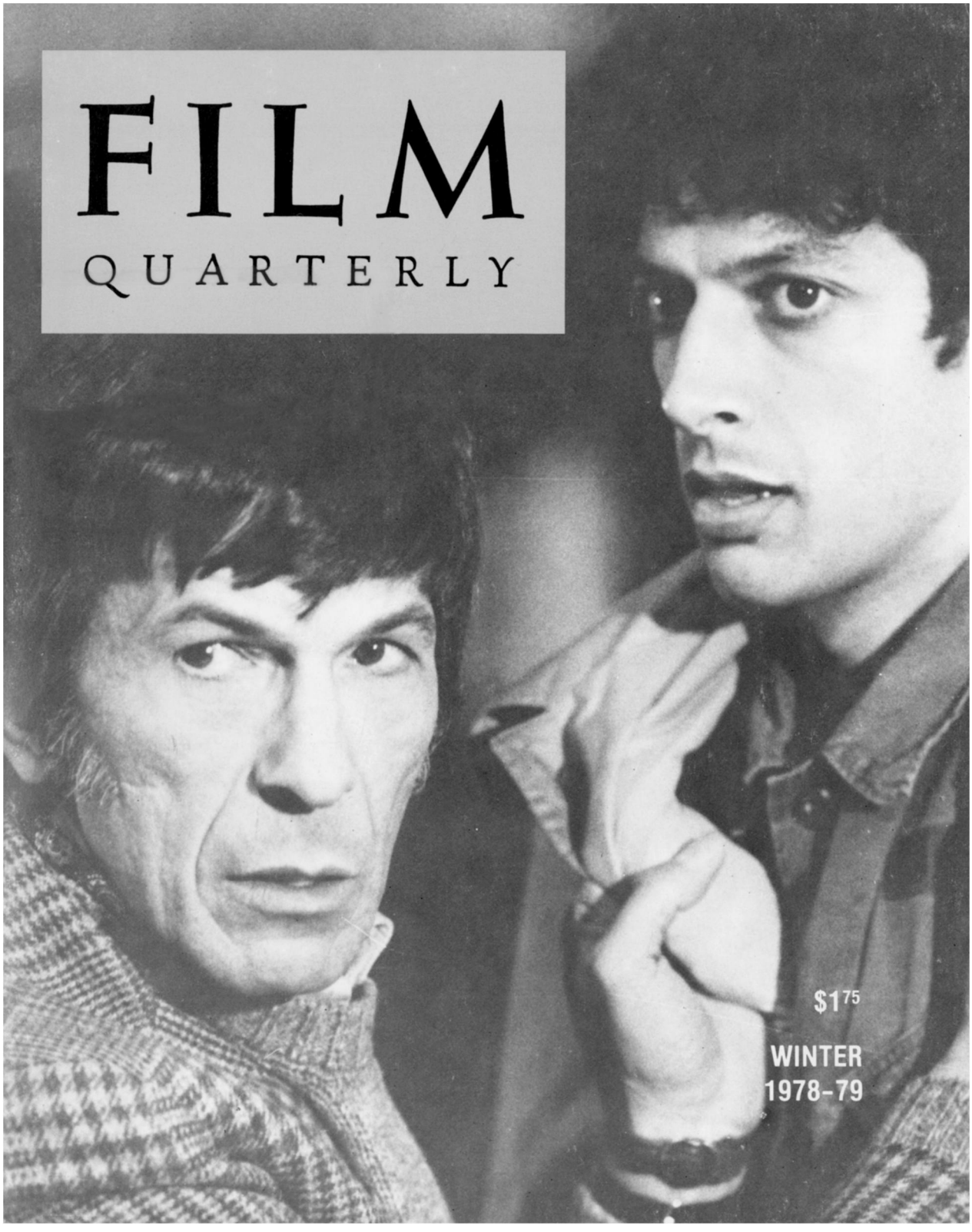
FILM QUARTERLY



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Editor's Notebook

FURTHER NOTES ON ANCIENT HISTORY

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CONTRIBUTORS

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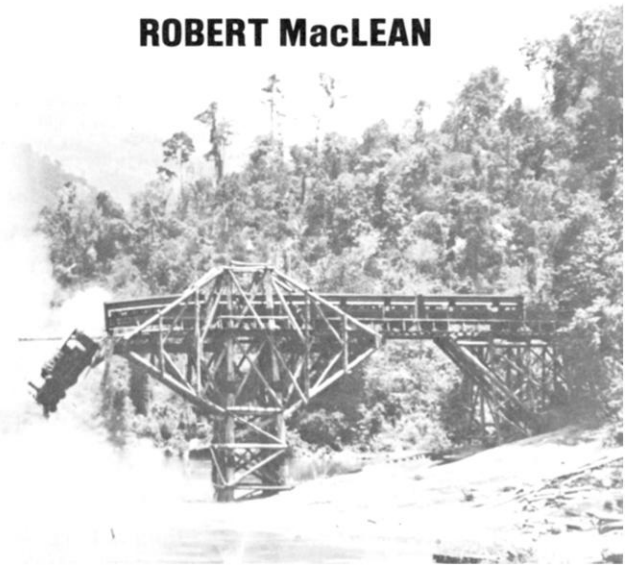
The Big-Bang Hypothesis: Blowing Up the Image

ROBERT MacLEAN



It might be argued, employing the traditional triad, that the primary interest of any film is its setting, rather than its plot or its characters. Whether established by complex editing or by long takes, whatever the technical rhetoric regarding the relation between aural or visual images and the reality —the coherent world of tangible things—represented, setting is what a film invariably offers us, what it most properly is. The world, or experience, of a film elaborates one or more of the whole gamut of rule-sets ranging from realism to fantasy, from *cinéma-vérité* to animation. According to widely shared aesthetic codes, plot, character and setting are most successful when most complementary, when each is most a function of the other two. *McCabe and Mrs. Miller,* for example, may be thought of as a film about snow, documented in a range of phases which filter the action, as the thaw-fed river mediates the image of a dying cowboy hovering eerily beneath its surface; one of the chief characters is a man frozen into an image, a "rep" that precedes and outlives him, just as his contours are swept smooth in the final snowstorm; and its plot concerns his struggle for control with that matriarchy which usually prevails in Altman's films, and which here offers shelter from the frozen snowscape. But even films which least satisfy the criteria of aesthetic integrity give pleasure simply by locating us in an environment, by making possible explorations which may be irrelevant either to those of its other inhabitants, the characters, or to its place in the argument of the plot. Godard once remarked that to watch a film is to dream, but that "people prefer to dream in the first degree rather than the second, which is the true reality."[1]

Not to use the triad too perversely, it should be stipulated that a character is as much a setting as is a landscape. This statement is not applicable to drama, in which the empathetic emphasis is reversed: Denmark is merely an extension of Hamlet; Didi and Gogo can wait anywhere. But when drama is filmed, as when *Waiting for Godot* is incorporated in *Cul de sac,* setting usurps the primacy of the characters, imprisons and is explored by them. That the logic of character itself constitutes a setting, a terrain to be experienced as one experiences the adoption of another personality in dream, is a point argued in *The Ballad of Cable*

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Hogue, with its motif of "passing through," its equations of self with landscape, property and collateral, and its acknowledged derivation of "character" from biblical and other archetypes. Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks on the personality are appropriate: "If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it,* I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book."[2] The faces and gestures of Vakulinchuk and the sailors of the *Potemkin* are no less settings than the ship and the steps of Odessa: not only is it possible, the film insists, to inhabit such postures and attitudes, but we are enjoined to adopt as ours and extend the revolutionary gesture. Similarly, Shane's heroic mannerisms and Wilson's grinning malice define Joey Starrett's world, and ours, in a fashion that defies distinction between "fantasy" and "reality," and as inexorably as the mountains that confine his vista and echo his voice hugely as Shane rides off. And plot, which Aristotle calls "the imitation of an action," is the graph of the characters' gestures and thus the continuity of setting—the temporal rather than spatial parameter of movement.

Small wonder, then, that the explosion has become such a fundamental element of film vocabulary; explosions destroy settings. To be sure, they have conventionally served to consummate plots, as in Chaplin's *Dough and Dynamite, The Bridge on the River Kwai, The Guns of Navarone, The Dirty Dozen, Operation Crossbow* and several others, so that plot moves toward something more like orgasm than like the peristaltic movement of Aristotle's account of tragedy. (*Bonnie and Clyde* and *Taxi Driver* argue the sexual nature of our wish to impose plot upon setting: their protagonists literally write and inhabit scenarios which culminate in hip-twitching death, the spending of ammunition in a whore house.) The explosion often signifies something repressed, as in *Village of the Damned, Deep Throat.* In *Sink the Bismark,* a strategic commander and his pretty assistant, far underground and constrained by military propriety, plot toward a final explosion: not until they emerge onto the surface does their relationship begin to assume a less sublimated aspect. This pattern of repressed sexuality is satirized in *Dr. Strangelove,* as is suggested by the characters' names—Mandrake, Jack D. Ripper, Buck Turgidson—by the plans of the elite to inhabit a sealed off mine shaft and by the gradual verticalization of the falling bomb as if to suggest the erection of the Slim Pickens character riding it. The explosion at the beginning of *That Obscure Object of Desire* occurs, in terms of its scrambled narrative, at the apparent end of a prolonged cock-tease, but is a false release, for the series of terrorist explosions with which the tease is associated have the threatening status of interruptions rather than of culminations. The explosions in *White Heat* (the second of which is an apparent allusion to the corresponding event in *The Great Train Robbery*), are counterpointed by images of entrapment—hide-outs, prison cells, the trunk of a car, eyes repeatedly photographed in rectangular frames: Cody Garrett is a man of maniacal energy who cannot be confined, and whose raging migraines, along with some glib psychology, indicate the interior source of the explosions. Nor is it solely this mystique of

Left: BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI.
Right: MCCABE AND MRS. MILLER.

alienated interiority which points toward a final explosion of the repressed: one of the explosions takes place on a drive-in-movie screen, a shot from an American war film, so that when the detonation of a globular storage tank, heavy-handedly designated "the world," issues in mushroom-shaped clouds, the film signifies its allegorization of the American lust for power. In these films, with the exceptions of *Dr. Strangelove* and *That Obscure Object of Desire,* explosions express something underlying and continuous, a cumulative energy that blossoms in ambiguous beauty, like Stanley Kowalski's tantrums, and thus represent that continuity, validate the plots by which they are confined and made possible.

At a critical point in a film called *Mirage,* Gregory Peck, having sorted illusion from reality and within an inch of victory over his adversary, addresses the vascillating good-bad guy who holds the gun and says, "Come on Harry, if you're not committed you're just taking up space." Harry is persuaded, but the force of this rhetoric is the target of several contemporary thinkers. William Burroughs invites us out of commitment, time, plot, redemptive scenario, into space. Kubrick satirizes the fiction of temporal continuity by cutting from a bone tossed by an ape to a space module, and thus bridges the longest time gap in the cinema with horizontal montage—makes of bone toss and space flight a single, continuous gesture, so automatically do we understand: evolution, the dominant myth of our century, is exhibited as a connective device, and renders credible the equation of "personality" with the sufficiently complex circuitry of HAL; again, we are invited out of time into space, out of plot into setting. If the contemporary disintegration of prose narrative can be thought of as beginning with Alain Robbe-Grillet, the corresponding development in the cinema can be dated from the appearance in 1950 of *Sunset Boulevard,* a film which reduces each of its characters to an absence (even Betty Schaeffer insists, at the Desmond mansion, "I'm not here; I haven't heard any of this"), and which undercuts its plot by having it narrated by someone who isn't there either, a quite literal ghost writer and professional juggler of plot clichés whose uninhabited image is caught by the cameras on the rectangular surface of a pool: portrait of the artist as a dead man. Character and plot having been cancelled, there remains only the settings: the streets of Hollywood, Schwab's, Paramount Studio and the fantastic mansion to which Joe Gillis's comments do no justice.

The opening sequence of *Sunset Boulevard* blends reality and fantasy, the documentary style with an expressionistically distorted shot from the bottom of the pool, as if from beyond death.[3] Thus the language of realism is rendered obsolete. Godard, for example, claims to occupy a position between Flaherty and Eisenstein, Lumière and Méliès, realism and fantasy; travelling in Hitchcock's less contentious wake, he argues that our perceptions of causality and continuity are purely

THE BALLAD OF CABLE HOGUE

conventional, and that we are obliged to come to terms with the language which regiments those perceptions, and which elaborates and exhibits the commercial nature of the media. Language, as the numerous allusions to Wittgenstein in *Alphaville* and *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* seem to confirm,[4] is primary and pervasive: we learn to talk before we learn to think; language *is* the setting—"the house," as Juliette says in the latter film, "in which man lives"—and calcifies in the texts institutionalized by the culture. Thus Godard brings together texts by Chandler, Borges and Hawks, Brecht and Faulkner, Eldridge Cleaver and the Rolling Stones, as Burroughs sutures fragments from Conrad and Graham Greene, so that language is exhibited rather than spoken, authorship nullified, forms emptied of content. (In this context, drama is an opposite consideration, as in Beckett's *Endgame:* "What is there to keep me here?" "The dialogue.") The heavy reliance upon quotation by Peckinpah, Scorsese, and De Palma is a derivative manner, and involves the recognition that the events of a plot are conventionally rather than causally determined.

As Ferdinand drives along a Riviera highway in *Pierrot le fou,* Marianne taunts, "Little fool—following a straight line, and he's got to stay with it to the end," whereupon he defiantly drives off the road and into the sea. Plot, our knowledge of sequence and procedure, is a present phenomenon, spatial rather than temporal, something we "grasp in a flash," in Wittgenstein's phrase,[5] and apply securely to the future out of complacency (Hitchcock), paralysis (Godard), naivëté (Leone), lack of alternative (Antonioni) or addiction (Burroughs). The pun in the title of Hitchcock's *Family Plot* brings forward the spatial, grid-like aspects of the plot: as a clergyman invokes God's mercy for the dead Maloney, an overhead camera looks down at Mrs. Maloney, pursued by Lumley through a maze of graveyard footpaths—a visual analogy for the pattern of accidents that bring people together in the film, and are the loci of its editing. That plot limits the world, is finally something one is buried in, or locked into, as into Adamson's soundproof, windowless basement room, gives central importance to Blanche's pose as a medium who communicates with the beyond. This emptying of plot forms and characterizations of substantial content lends itself easily to trivialization (as in Marcello's remark, in *8 ½*, in which the structure of the film is represented visually as scaffolding, "I have nothing to say, and I insist on saying it"), but turns aptly to hand in the suspense film, which is premised upon the instability of the environment. David Hume, arguing that no necessary principle of motivation or interiority stabilizes character, imagines a visit with a trusted friend who might be "seized with a sudden and unknown frenzy" to stab him;[6] one might easily construe the first third of *Psycho* as a gloss on this remark. Hume goes on to discuss earthquakes and the like, but they have been replaced by the explosion in modern symbolism: Hitchcock's use of it in *Sabotage* makes of Stevie, as he wanders with his time bomb among the London crowds, a figure of innocent Death as riveting as Bengt Ekerot's in *The Seventh Seal.* Hitchcock has pointed out that an audience's apprehension before a bomb explodes overrides any of its positive or negative feelings about the involved characters: "And you would be wrong," he told Truffaut, "in thinking that this is due to the fact that the bomb is an especially frightening object."

Rather, impending explosions illustrate the nightmarish instability of experience. The car explosion in *The Big Heat,* its acknowledged descendant in *Mean Streets,* and that which blows apart Michael's medieval romantic world in *The Godfather,* while examples of surprise rather than of suspense, deprive the respective male protagonists of their women, their domestic worlds—their settings. The sympathetic explosives expert in *The Professionals* and his descendant in *Duck, You Sucker!* (indeed both Peckinpah and Leone have made extensive use of the Brooks film) are men who have loved and lost, who have insight into the centrifugal nature of life and who blow things up with amoral righteousness: in the latter film, Sean, who claims to have given up moral judgments for an exclusive belief in dynamite, repeatedly detonates the contexts upon which Juan depends for his sense of identity—moves him from analog to digital, from the continuous to the discrete—as Leone does the myths and stock gestures which are his materials, acceptance of or identification with which constitutes an uncritical failure to duck.

Sean's role as Juan's perfect master extends the logic of samurai discipline and Buddhist gun-

fighter, as represented by Charles Bronson in *Once Upon a Time in the West,* but it also has Christian implications, as in fact all of Leone's films are preoccupied with Catholicism: in *A Fistful of Dollars,* the man with no name rides humbly into town on a donkey, liberates a new holy family (he too has loved and lost), destroys the old order and announces his triumphant and invincible rise from the dead with a series of dynamite explosions. His demolition of the hold of powerful families on the town is reminiscent of John T. Chances's opposition of the Burdetts in *Rio Bravo,* and his final use of dynamite to blow them out into the open. Moreover, the man with no name raises visible hell and casts in malefactors; and explosions frequently create such hells, as in *The Pirate, The Chase, The War Game,* and by psychoanalytic implication, the dissilient-shit episode in *La Grande Bouffe.* The explosions that begin *Johnny Guitar* (a film which turns up again, fragmented and rearranged, in *Once Upon a Time in the West*), *The War Game* and *Marathon Man* signal that things are falling apart, the center has not held, and inaugurate a hell through which the chief characters must pass. But mere anarchy is hell only for those obsessed with control: as *Marathon Man's* detonator-doll in a baby carriage and the final shot of *Duck, You Sucker!* suggest, the explosion can indicate the attainment of maturity, a relaxing of grip on contexts which are unstable, vulnerable to subversion. Like *Marathon Man,* De Palma's *The Fury* deals with an ultra-secret spy organization run by a power maniac: before Gillian blasts her opponent into a suspended, slowly expanding cosmos of burning fragments, she commands, "You go to hell."

Besides completing that film's cyclical eschatology, Gillian's explosive assertion typifies an act of criticism that, since Godard's public theorizing, has proliferated in the cinema. Not only does the photograph codify a scene in terms of color tone and shape, but the moving camera analyzes gesture and progression as a series of discrete pictures which, however scrambled, exhibit order and "sense"; so that "cinema," as Bruno says in *Le Petit Soldat,*" is the truth twenty-four times per second." The obvious parallel to Gillian's explosion, of course, is the one in the final sequence of *Zabriskie Point,* at the death of a rebellious, uncommitted hijacker of an airplane on the side of which he has written "NO WORDS": explosions, literally rather than metaphorically, blow apart what words (universals, logical connections) hold together and make sense of. By the time of his death, Sky Father has impregnated Earth Mother with his peculiar divinity—another pattern paralleled in *The Fury*—in the filmic epitome of American motorized courtship rituals, and the issue of their mating is Daria's ability to stand apart from organized thinking and explode the trap of commercially controlled signs that keep her earthbound. Upon learning of Mark's death, Daria looks furiously at the house in which yet another visual grid, a plot, is being imposed upon the desert landscape, and "causes" a slow-motion explosion—whether real or fantastic is, of course, not clear—which sends typical fragments of a middle-class environment floating before the camera. The importance of this explosion is that it implies what the camera can do, and thus elaborates Antonioni's previous *Blow-Up,* which concerns the enlargement of a photograph until it becomes apparent that something, an aimed pistol, is "out there" beyond the configuration of dots which encodes the scene (the setting), giving meaning to the frozen gestures; the photographer is left without unambiguous answers to his questions, performing mime-troupe gestures only "as if" in relation to a contextual reality. In *The Passenger,* Antonioni returns to an explicit consideration of the camera.[7] The association of the explosion with photography has itself become a convention. In Jiri Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains,* another film which ends with a sublimated bang, an anarchic photographer awakens to find that his house has been blown from around him by an air raid, and surrenders to laughter. In a recent commercial, a car is exploded slow-motion in mid-flight from a cliff as the announcer comments on each of its parts. A similar ad shows the detonation of a camera, describes improvements in the construction and has the fragments implode to reassemble as the new model, finishing with the comment, "The Pentax M E: it's dynamite."[8] Like the photograph, the explosion is a violent rupture of context and continuity, imposes decomposition, makes things dead, and is thus a potential tool of liberation. It is Kubrick's claim to have learned to stop worrying and love the bomb.

ZABRISKIE POINT

NOTES

1. "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard by Jean Collet," trans. Toby Mussman, *Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 141.
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 631. Subsequent references are noted in the text.
3. In style and in function, this shot appears derived from that of the reflection in Miriam's glasses at the point of her death in *Strangers on a Train.*
4. See my "Opening the Private Eye: Wittgenstein and Godard's *Alphaville*" in *Sight and Sound,* Winter 1977-78, pp. 46-49.
5. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), 138, 139. Subsequent references are noted in the text.
6. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Charles W. Hendel (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), p. 100.
7. See my "*The Passenger* and Reporting: Photographic Memory," in *Film Reader,* February 1978, pp. 189-96, for a discussion of the film as an allegory of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Locke's analysis of the empirical world into simple ideas of sensation, his definition of understanding as a taking apart rather than as a putting together ("wit"), and his employment of the *camera obscura* as a model of the mind are considerations here; but he is also worth mentioning because the solipsism explicit in the *Essay* and developed by Berkley informs several of the films mentioned, particularly *The Fury.*
8. Such TV derivations are common: *2001* is used to sell cassette razors and McLaren's *Pas de deux* to promote feminine hygiene. It might be appropriate to a discussion of *The Fury's* handling of communication to mention the sequence in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* in which Charley dictates a telegram over the telephone while a game of pool is played in the background—hence the recent Bell Canada panegyric about getting messages through, spoken over film of expert pool shots illustrating the causal sequence of sender-message-receiver.

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ALAN ROSENTHAL

Ellen Hovde: An Interview

Ellen Hovde is one of the most gifted and articulate of **cinéma-vérité** *editors. Alan Rosenthal interviewed her just after she had finished work on* **Grey Gardens,** *which posed many of the murderous problems characteristic of editing work in the genre. Hovde produced NET's* **Head Start in Mississippi,** *edited Margaret Mead's* **New Guinea Journal,** *and has also directed. She is probably best known, however, for her association with the Maysles brothers. She co-edited* **Salesman (1966)** *with Charlotte Zwerin, and did the same with the Rolling Stones feature* **Gimme Shelter.** *On both* **Christo's Valley Curtain (1974)** *and* **Grey Gardens (1975)** *she is credited as co-director along with David and Albert Maysles, with Muffie Meyer as the fourth director in the latter film.*

Grey Gardens *is a portrait of two unusual women—Edith Bouvier Beale (Big Edie) and her 55-year-old unmarried daughter, Edie (Little Edie). They lead a squalid hermit-like existence in a crumbling East Hampton mansion on Long Island. The film shows the intimate details of the lives of the two women, with their strengths and vanities there for all to see; it is a beautifully wrought film. As Rosenthal puts it (the following interview will appear in his forthcoming new book on documentary),* **Grey Gardens** *"reveals more about human relationships than almost any film I can remember." But when it was first shown, it was violently criticized by some viewers as an unethical invasion of the women's privacy (though of course they had given consent to being filmed). Such questions are seldom discussed in regard to documentary, though Rosenthal regards them as pertinent and important. (In this case he "totally agrees" with Hovde on these points.)*

Since completing **Grey Gardens** *Hovde has produced and directed* **Middle Age** *for the "Woman Alive" television series. She directed (again with the Maysles and Muffie Meyer)* **The Burk Family,** *and produced and directed several films for "Sesame Street."*

Ellen, the last few years you have been associated with the Maysles brothers on various films. What were you doing before that; how did you come into films?

Well, I came into films years ago . . . through editing. I had originally gone to drama school to be a stage director, and didn't find enough work to keep me together. I then found a job in a film school as an administrative assistant, got interested in film, and soon apprenticed myself to a film editor who taught at the school.

I felt that, at least in documentary film (I haven't

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had much experience in theatrical film, though I'm producing and directing one now), the person who is doing the editing is doing something very like a mix of writing and stage directing: that person is shaping, forming and structuring the material, and making the decisions about what is really going to be there on the screen—what the ideas are, what the order of events will be, where the emphasis will be.

These responsibilities very often rest almost entirely with the editor. Some documentary directors do sit in the cutting room and take part in these decisions, but many do not. Many simply give the editor the footage and say, "when you have a cut, let me know . . .", and they go away. So the editor, alone, makes absolutely basic decisions—the sort of decisions that the director and producer, when they come back, have to base their decisions *upon.* They may have photographic memories or may have taken detailed notes about the material . . . they will say, ". . . look, there must be a better shot than that" or ". . . we must somehow make the point how poor these people are" and so on—all valuable criticisms. But the way things are structured, and whether the film is "working" to make the desired points . . . that is really done in the cutting room.

Are you talking basically about cinéma vérité *or have you worked with the old pre-structured, prescripted films? How do you get the balance between the director's responsibility and yours?*

I've worked with all those systems. There are documentaries that are pre-structured—some people even record a narration first and then have you go out and shoot pictures to fit it. Quite boring. Yes, I've done that. And then there are those montages that everyone used to do, usually to music . . . commercials still use that technique. It's difficult to do well, and it's certainly the editor who makes it work if it's going to. But it's in *cinéma vérité* that the editing takes on the same importance as the camera work . . . and camera work and editing combined *are* directing, in *cinéma vérité.*

What was the first vérité *film that you cut?*

Oh, boy! I suppose it was at a company called "Filmmakers," with Bob Drew and Ricky Leacock and Don Pennebaker; and the Maysles were there as well. We did many films—in fact, we all learned how to do this as we went along, by working on films like *Susan Starr* . . . then there was a film about the Aga Khan . . . then a film called *The Chair,* about a man who is about to be electrocuted, Paul Crump. And there were films with the Kennedys and so on.

What did you learn during that time about that new style of editing totally non-scripted films?

Well, first of all, speaking technically, we had to develop a whole new attitude toward how the film would *look.* The camera wasn't on a tripod anymore and was swooping around all over the place, zooming in to find focus and zooming out again (often in the middle of something very important!), running out of film at the worst possible moments —and of course nothing was repeatable, it was real life. So we would cut and patch and discard old conventions and invent new ones. On the good side the films had a kind of new vitality and energy that was very exciting; on the bad, we all sometimes tried to push footage around and convince ourselves we *had* something on film, that we didn't.

But I guess the most important thing we learned was that you have to take an enormous amount of material, shot in real time, and sift it and sort it and condense it into a "dramatically told" story. People who shoot this kind of film shoot a lot, because if you are shooting an event that doesn't have those predetermined beginnings, middles, and ends, you don't *know* where the critical moment is going to be—often you don't even know what the *story* is going to be. You think you do, because you've got to have something to hold on to when you're shooting, but unless it's a film like *On The Pole,* which was another of those Filmmakers films —a film about the Indianapolis 500, and you know there is going to be a race and there's going to be a finish to the race . . . unless it's like that, you don't actually know in a lot of these films what the outcome is going to be, or who the important character will be.

The first person who has to contribute to those decisions is the person who decides to film that particular situation; and then the cameraperson, whoever that is, has to make a constant, running series of split-second decisions about what's happening and what will happen next and how important it is . . . The person who is taking sound is often the so-called journalist or reporter, and he or she is often nudging the cameraperson, saying oh,

do that, do that, while the cameraperson is doing this, and this. (If they have a good rapport they work it out between them; if not, well, cameramen have been known not to shoot any close-ups simply because they didn't like the person they were filming, or to shoot very badly a scene they didn't want to shoot. Editors of course also do such things by making a poor cut of a sequence they don't believe in.) Anyway, I would never minimize the decisions that are made like that in the field; it is extremely difficult to know whether you "have something" or you do not. Generally speaking, people I've worked with have tried to keep shooting until they have some sense in their gut that there is a film there . . . that there was some critical scene in which something "happened."

In *Grey Gardens* that critical scene was what we called "the pink room." The scene that is placed very near the end of the film, although it happened very near the beginning of the shooting. That's the scene where Edie Beale tells a story about a man who wanted to marry her, and her mother sent him away in 15 minutes. Now Edie told that story, during those five weeks of shooting, at least three or four times on film, but the *particular* time she told it in the pink room—for some reason, it had a lot of pain in it, in fact she cried when she told her story. And when we saw that, it moved us, we thought we had something. We didn't really know what we had; we thought it gave us some kind of insight into the relationship between these two women, and what kind of pain they could cause each other.

Can we just go back to how you started working in close co-operation with the Maysles. You said that you had been working on a few films, but during the last few years you seem to have been working almost exclusively with them?

Yes. I used to have a company with my ex-husband, Adam Giffard. We made films, particularly in Mississippi during the Movement, but Adam hated producing and our company more or less dissolved. I then began working more and more with David and Albert, and Charlotte Zwerin as well. I cannot really say why we kept on working together, except that we are all fond of each other and seem to get on very well, and the films that we have worked on together have been things we all like and they've been fairly successful. I still do independent productions. I make films for "Sesame Street." I'm making right now a dramatic fiction film on a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. I'm involved in a possible feature deal, and so on . . . and none of these are Maysles productions.

What was the first you heard of Grey Gardens *—of the idea, of the concept? Do you remember its very first moments?*

Yes. While I was working on the film, *Christo's Valley Curtain*, David and Al were starting to shoot a film with Lee Radziwill about her childhood in East Hampton. The idea of the film was that they would go out with Lee and photograph her talking to a lot of people who had known her parents, had known her and Jackie, and so on. And one of the people she wanted to interview was her aunt, Mrs. Beale, because obviously she knew a lot about Lee's parents and their early life, and Lee liked her a lot, I think. And it was at that time that the Suffolk County Board of Health raided the Beale's house and tried to evict them because of "unsanitary living conditions." Lee was put in charge of renovating the house, by the Bouvier family, who of course got involved in the publicity. And so, partly because Lee wanted to talk to her aunt about the past, and partly because she had business to do there, she and the Maysles spent a fair amount of their time at that house, more than Lee would have done ordinarily.

David and Al then began to shoot what was going on, which was of course amazing. Here were these two women who were very flamboyant, very theatrical, very funny . . . in the midst of a crisis. They were trying to save their house and their way of life. The footage began to come back, and David and I looked at that footage and he said, "Come on, let's just put it together very roughly and see if we can't talk Lee into making a film mainly about the Beales."

So in a week and a half we put together a very rough hour-and-a-half film, and showed it to Lee, and she hated it. It wasn't at all what she had in mind, and she said "Please, I do not want to do this at all, I want to go back to my original idea." And David and Al said they didn't want to go back to that, because this was obviously much more interesting, and she said, "Please give me the negative and let's quit." So they had to do that, because

they didn't own it. She took the negative and went away, and we all went on to other things and thought that would be the end of it.

But no one was able to forget this incredible couple who had dominated that film; we all felt that if there was ever going to be an opportunity to make a film about these two people, we would like to do it. David, especially, felt close to Little Edie, and since he had a summer place out there near the Beale house he stayed in touch with her and talked to her frequently about making a film. And then, when a year had gone by and Lee had done nothing about the footage we had given up, the Maysles decided to go ahead and venture making a film about these two women. Big Edie didn't really want to do it, at first. Little Edie did.

At that point, did David and Al say to you what they thought they had been looking for in this film, what might come out?

No, never, they had no idea.

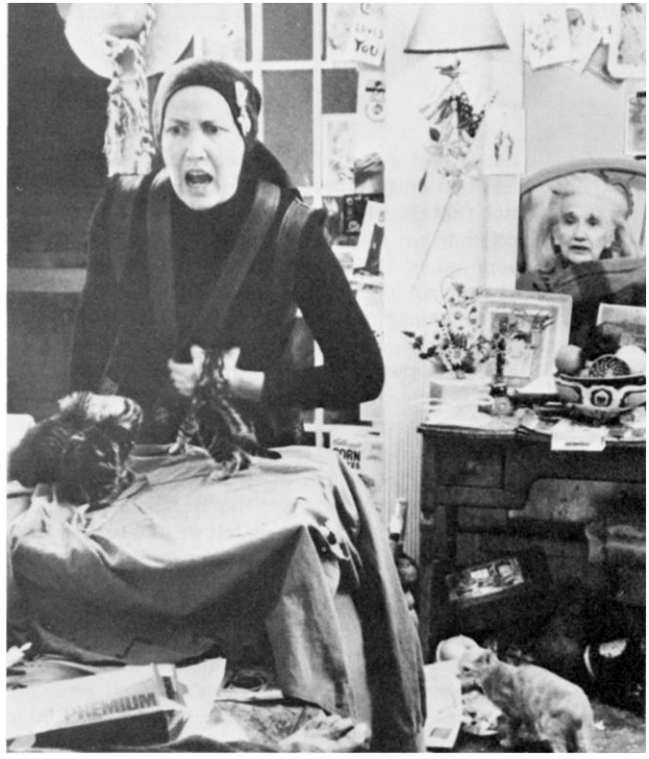
Just a sense that the material was there?

Just a sense of two charismatic people; that there must be a story there. They have a sublime confidence in sensing that there are people who are interesting people and leading interesting lives . . . but what the film would be "about," they had no concept. In fact, Muffie (Muffie Meyer, a co-director and co-editor on the film) and I once, during the editing, sat them down with a tape recorder and tried to get them to put into words what they thought they were doing, and they were unable to say; they really had no idea even why they were interested in these people.

Finally we suggested to Al that he was interested in Big Edie because she was rather like his mother, and that struck a chord in him . . . he was very involved with his mother, who had recently died. David said that it was maybe because he identified with Little Edie because he too was afraid of getting married, and was very attached to family. But that was as far as they could come with any reasons for making the film. The big reason was just that they wanted to do it, and so did Muffie and I.

You and Muffie are listed as co-directors of this film. What exactly does that mean? When material started coming in, what was your function; how did you work on the material?

Well, I started before Muffie did. When the material came in, I and David and Susan Froemke



GREY GARDENS

(who was then the assistant), looked at it together, and usually Al did too. And we just let it wash over us. We all made notes about what appealed to us, but what I did when I first started working on it was to go for that scene in the pink room, to see whether that was going to be the strong, pivotal scene we all hoped it would be.

The material in general was very strange; you almost couldn't tell if you had anything until you cut it, because it was very free-flowing, very repetitive—it didn't have obvious structure—there were no events, there was nothing around which a conversation was going to wheel, there were no other people in and out of the house except for Jerry, and Lois Wright. It was all kind of the same in a gross way, and you had to dig into it, try to find motivations, condense the material to bring out psychological tones.

Did you start editing before you had all the material, or did you have all the material available and then start to look at it?

I didn't start cutting until we had all the material, and I then started on scenes that simply appealed to me. I was not examining myself too closely

about that either. I was always, I guess, looking for relationship, because I felt there was no question that the film would turn around a dependency relationship in a family, and that interested me very much. When Muffie came, David and I had already cut a few scenes, and we all went over what we had, and decided which scenes we would cut next. I think we were pushing in film terms towards a novel of sensibility rather than a novel of plot.

We were still pretty much cutting things that we liked—that were funny, or had emotional outbursts from Edie, or songs from Mrs. Beale. Because the "raid" by the Board of Health had been such a traumatic experience for the Beales, they talked about it constantly, and we felt we had to deal with that and we cut a lot of material relating to it.

Sometimes when you are doing a vérité *film, the difficulty is defining what the film is about. You are going off in seven different directions till you find what it's all about. Was there that problem with this film, or were you pretty clear which direction you wanted from the start?*

No, I don't think we were clear at all. I think we all knew there was nothing in terms of "action," but what was really going on was not clear. David thought in the beginning that the issue was, would Edie leave or not. Well, for Muffie and me that was never an issue. We felt absolutely certain that Edie had no intention of leaving, and that her *talk* about leaving—which she did all the time—was simply one of the devices that she and her mother used as a kind of conveyance of feeling . . . that neither had the slightest intention of changing the balance of power, or the situation. In fact, we felt that each knew exactly how far the other could be teased or goaded or pushed, before causing an action which might actually change the situation . . . and then each withdrew, because it was the battle, and not changes, that interested them.

The main themes that Muffie and I decided to go with were the questions around "why were mother and daughter *together*—so together that they almost totally excluded the rest of the world?" And in order to build audience interest, we began to structure the material so that first, it would be possible for the audience to believe that the mother was strong, witty and charming, and was taking care of Little Edie, her daughter, who was too weak and fearful ever to have gone and lived a life of her own by herself.

Our second theme was that it was possible that Edie was there to take care of her *mother,* and that her mother was very demanding, manipulative . . . it was she who arranged that her daughter couldn't leave, because she needed someone to wait on her and didn't want to be left alone. Our third theme, the resolution of the other two, was that we wanted the audience to feel finally that the relationship was a symbiotic one, and that on both sides, the need to care and be cared for was equal . . . it was a balanced situation of dependency and strength, love and hate.

Did Al and David come in on the structuring, or was it left to you and Muffie?

Al never comes in on structure; he has never, to my knowledge, been in on the structuring of a film. David wasn't involved in the structure of this one very much, though he often is. For one thing, the editing process was very long, and they had to go and make some money to keep everything going, so they were out doing commercials, that sort of thing. Muffie and I structured the film. David came in when he could. David is always very interested in the editing process and sometimes takes part, but here the main work we did together, except at the very beginning, was at the end. Then, there were certain scenes that Muffie and I wanted to have in, that he didn't want; there were some that he wanted and we didn't want. We traded off on those. David, of course, is the producer, and if he really puts his foot down and you are unable to convince him, you give in. I would say, nothing was ever done without David's agreement.

You mentioned those scenes that you traded off, scenes you wanted and David didn't. Can you tell me about these scenes?

Yes, Muffie and I wanted a scene in, which first of all was very nice in terms of photographic variety. It was shot from the garden, looking up at Little Edie in a window—she was shouting down, talking about politics, and was complaining bitterly about the local Republican politics. And then she went into a general statement, quite a funny one, about politics in general and Republican politics in particular. It was very witty and always got a laugh, and was a lovely change from always being in that bedroom.

But the real reason why we wanted it was that it showed Edie in a moment that was not narcissistic . . . she was showing that she did read, that she was aware of public events, that she thought about them and that she had very strong opinions about them. We felt that it was a very strong card to play in presenting her character, because she does come off so easily as a completely narcissistic and dependent person who is unaware of anything outside her mirror. She is *not* like that, and so we did feel strongly that the scene should be in. In fact, we were constantly putting it in, and David was constantly taking it out.

Why did he want it out?

David was never able to explain to us satisfactorily why he wanted it out. He said that it was self-serving, that he simply didn't like it, that he didn't want Edie talking about politics. I think it had something to do with the fact that he thought it was some kind of cheap shot for a Kennedy-related person to talk about Republican politics. That's about as close as I could get to his reason, and he finally said "It just has to go, I will not have it."

What are the scenes that he wanted in and you didn't want?

Let's see. The beginning, I'm not fond of . . . the way the newspaper scene worked. I wanted to start the film (and Muffie did too) with a dolly shot down Lily Pond Lane where the Beales live; on that road are enormous houses with espaliered trees, and fancy gravelled driveways—they are very elegant. And we thought it would be wonderful to just go right past those houses and come to the Beales' house. You would be immediately saying a lot. You would be putting them in a context. Now both David and Al were adamant about that they would never do that shot. Al said, "I don't care where this house is, it could be in the middle of Harlem, and the story would be the same." Muffie and I don't agree at all; we think the story has very much to do with the society, and the place, and the contrast of the way they live with the way people live around them, the class they come from and how they deviated from that. We think it's critical.

And Al did not?

He refused to shoot it. He did do some still shots of other houses and scenes in East Hampton, and we used those, which helped a lot.

The Beale house in GREY GARDENS

Was there any material that you felt was too painful or too private to include? I want to get on to that question because many people have criticized the film for being too exposing of the women. They say that it should not have been made, and so on. What were the judgments or the self-censorship, if at all, that you used on the film?

I don't think there were any too painful or too private events that they talked about. I don't think we eliminated anything because it was too private, except certain physical scenes of Edie's partial nudity. She wore very odd, wonderful, make-shift costumes, and sometimes they were really very, very revealing. We always eliminated those.

I think we felt in the footage that there was a certain need to balance out the two women, and it was hard to do. Mrs. Beale, who was a very, very strong personality, often came off as extremely cruel and bitchy and ruthless; and in a way we almost wanted to protect her from making that kind of impression too strongly. It was partly true but it wasn't the whole story. For one thing, Edie's ways of getting back at her mother were cruel too—she handled her mother by withholding, by delaying information, food, whatever. She was just as involved, just as manipulative in her way. But her way was much harder to present on film, because Mrs. Beale's way was with wit and charm, which always attracts people. It was one of the things we really struggled with.

As for exploitation, Muffie and I worried a great deal during the cutting about exploiting them, and exposing them to ridicule from people who wouldn't understand them, and so on. David and Al never did. They felt that everything that had gone on was all right, and that if the Beales revealed themselves completely, fine. And I think that they were absolutely right.

I think that really what happens in that film is that an audience is amazed and identifies with them, and is frightened, maybe repelled. But when people say that those women were exploited, I think what they are really thinking about is themselves.

I think basically all *vérité* films are criticized on that ground that you are invading someone's privacy, just by pointing a camera at them. On the other hand I think that people are aware in our society of what a camera is, and very aware of what they ought to be doing in front of it, so unless a person is really *non compos mentis* it is pretty hard to put someone in a film with their own knowledge and consent, without them having a very good idea of what is going on.

Now the criticism in this film is that they did not have any knowledge of what was going on, but *I* think that they *did.* At the time of cutting it, I was not sure that they did, but since it was made, it is clear to me that they knew and accepted a great deal about themselves, that other people had no idea of.

The Beales themselves were the ones who really defended the film more than anyone. They saw the film at their house and loved it. I thought—fine. That just means that they recognize themselves, but when they see it with an audience, and the audience begins to pick up on certain things, and to laugh at certain things, their reaction may change. I sat with Edie at Lincoln Center when she saw it for the first time with an audience. She laughed, she cried, she enjoyed it. She treated it almost as if it were someone else, and yet she realized very well that it was herself and her mother.

And then, in the months when there was a lot of controversy about it, it was Mrs. Beale and Edie who called us and said, "You know there has been this criticism—don't worry. It's all right. We know that it is an honest picture. We believe in it. We don't want you to feel upset." That was their attitude and they never wavered from that.

Some of the things that people have said to me when I go around and speak about the film are, "Well you know, those two are not quite right in the head, and therefore they are not responsible for themselves, and therefore you had no right to expose them in this way. They had no idea of what they were revealing." Actually I've mostly heard that in New York. However, no one stops to remember they managed their own affairs all their lives. No one tried to institutionalize them, and it is presumptuous to make decisions for other people about what they do or do not understand unless they are really incompetent, and I do not think that they are incompetent. You get into the issue, well does a person *really* know what they are revealing, and I don't think that it is possible for anyone to really know what they are revealing. That is a risk that you take, but they took it gladly, and I think that they were very courageous to do it.

At what point did you know, "that's it, the film is finished." That you had it completely, when there must be a tendency to go on, to change or to play around?

Well, Mufffie and I worked it into a form where we thought we had something basically along those lines that I described, "did Edie stay to care for mother, did her mother keep Edie to protect her, or were they both involved and were both fulfilling needs of their own." That was our base line. When we had that, we had been working a long time, and we began to screen the film for just a few very close friends, to see whether *they* were getting what we thought *we* had gotten out of it, not knowing anything about the Beales.

There were confusions, and certain people were upset about certain things. The most interesting thing that happened (I think it happens always for people who edit film) is that if you invite someone to see a film that you've never shown to anyone, they don't have to say a word. Just the fact that a stranger to the film is *sitting* with you, throws you into the audience yourself. Your own perceptions of the film change completely, and you begin to see it for the first time as an audience yourself.

That is what we tried to do and it was very successful for us. We saw the film in new ways and began to really hone it down. We had a blackboard thing with three-by-five white cards with scene numbers on them, and we really spent a lot of time shoving them around, saying "Let's take this scene where Edie shows that she can swim (which means that she has a kind of style and confidence) and put it ahead of the little bit here. What will that do?" We played with that until we were almost

blind. And once it settled down, it began to lock down almost like a crystal formation, and began to be impossible to move whole blocks of scenes apart. They just seemed inevitable, and the film (quite rapidly, I think) finally got locked down.

You said that all the material had been finished before you started editing it, but did you find there were still things you would really have liked to talk to David and Al about, saying, "We need you to film this—to do some more filming—to help us with the structure and the form."

Well we did do that, and they did go back and do more filming.

Do you remember the things you asked them to shoot?

We never asked them to go back and ask the Beales to talk about anything. That is a cardinal rule with all of us. It is something you don't do. But we needed a few things technically to smooth a few transitions. Cutting around two characters in one location, changing costumes every day, really is a terrible problem, so you are always trying to think of ways to cut, and things to use as cutaways. There are certain scenic things that we wanted—certain things that Al had done but weren't quite right, like the shot of the moon at night over the house. We said "Do that again, Al, and do it better." There was also the tracking shot we wanted of the other houses in East Hampton. Al finally compromised. He didn't give us the track but he gave us a number of individual shots. They weren't quite as elegant as the simple shot, but they did the trick.

One of the other problems with the cutting was that these women talked on top of each other all the time, and there was almost no room tone—no silences. As one conversation finished and you wanted to say, "Bam, that's the end of the scene," the other voice would begin. This made for certain unsolvable problems. So we said, "Go back and try and get Edie to repeat this sentence." Edie was a pro. She could hear the original recording and then repeat it with the same emotional tone. We never asked her to say something that she had not said, but both she and her mother were able to give you a new line that was clean.

How did working on Grey Gardens *affect your general feelings about what* vérité *could and couldn't do?*

EDIE: *I got fat not wearing clothes for two years.*
MRS. BEALE: *Oh, that wasn't it—it was the quarts and quarts of ice cream. My bill was $171 just for ice cream!*

I guess it changed my feelings very much about *cinéma vérité.* I felt we were pushing it in a new direction, and so did Muffie. You know the kind of axiom of the people who invented *vérité.* They were all cameramen, and they had really objected to tampering with reality. Reality to them really means you photograph it as it happened and you do not cut it. It is just happening. You hear Pennebaker say this, and Leacock will say it, and I am sure Al will say it too.

It is just patently untrue, you know; all those films were *always* cut. The difficulty in condensing reality is that it is not written as well as O'Neill. It is not as economical. And when you try and condense it into film time, you very often find that the whole scene is falling apart. If the audience could sit there and watch for 30 hours the material would be wonderful. But they won't. So you have to condense, and it falls apart.

So the first real problem is to condense "real time" into "film time" without it losing the very quality that you liked so much about it. It was also very difficult in this film but it is was the interesting thing about it, how to make a film about *process,* rather than *events.* We were really trying to take real people's lives, and the interactions between people, and make *that* interesting because it is psychologically interesting, and not because something is going to happen that you are waiting for.

It is, as I said, a novel of sensibility, and in the end slightly Proustian, though I don't mean to be arrogant about it. What I mean is that if you can interest an audience and hold them, because you

are trying to do something psychologically revealing, that is a *new way* to think about *vérité.* One of the things we did like that, for instance, was the story that I talked to you about, in the pink room. That was one of the critical scenes where Little Edie cries about the fact that her mother sent away the man who might have married her.

Edie told that story several times. We used it twice in the film; she tells the entire story earlier in the film and she *laughs* about it, and then she repeats almost word for word the dialogue, and *cries* about it. There were many other smaller instances in the film where we did repeat information, because we were making a film about an obsessive, repetitive relationship, and what we wanted to show our audience were not the words but the emotional affect and the tone. The words were simply like Pavlov reactions. The story would just roll out, and the responses would be there automatically. But what was *really* going on, was that their relationships had different emotional tones at different times, and they were expressing their needs that way rather than by events or by varying their conversation. And they did not have to have very much conversation, a couple of topics would do.

Now all this is very risky for the film maker because you hope an audience will understand that and will go with it and will bear with it, even at times when it might seem boring. But your hope is that they are hooked enough that they will stick with you and come out the other end and not feel that they have been bored.

How did you work with Muffie? I find it very unusual to have two editors. Are your tastes very similar?

Yes. First of all I like very much working with other people. I have worked frequently with Charlotte Zwerin and Charlotte, Muffie and I edited many of the Maysles' films. Charlotte and I feel, and I think Muffie does too, that there is an advantage in several editors. There is so much footage coming in; for example in *Grey Gardens* we had a minimum of 80 hours of sync footage, and then 70 reels of wild track, and 30 to 40 reels of other stuff. One person cannot really hold all of that inside without help. If you can share that burden with someone who has sensibilities close to your own, it is just so much easier.

Then sometimes you just get tired, and you cannot think about an alternate way of doing something—you are locked into it—and then your friend says, "Well, give me that scene, and I'll try something slightly different." And we would just trade scenes, sometimes in the middle, if we were stuck, or we would do complementary scenes. We always discussed the film in the morning and tried to be pretty sure that we had the same ultimate goal. But then it is just gravy after that, delightful to have someone to bounce ideas with.

It is unusual, but not, I think, all that strange. Musicians do it a lot, Rogers and Hammerstein, Gilbert and Sullivan. And film is a kind of communal thing anyway. I have never believed in the *auteur* theory of film, with certain very few exceptions. In *vérité* I do not know of anyone who really creates the whole thing by himself, and I think it is nonsense to say that it is done by one person. All of this started, I think, because we had four directors on the film. The reason we have is that there *were* four directors on the film, and the responsibility and the creativity was shared equally. The word is a little misleading. Al hates the word "director" because he feels that it implies that he told people what to do, which is not the meaning at all. It means that we made the film, and that it would have been a different film had any of us not been there.

If the root of politics is power transactions then this is a very political film, wouldn't you say?

Yes, very much so. It is political in the sense that it is dealing with human relationships, a very modern situation, where people were living in intimate contact with maybe only one other person. Today, living in nuclear families, we expect the other person to fill all our needs, and we to fill all theirs, and people get into very bizarre situations, even in quite ordinary-looking homes. When people see *Grey Gardens* sometimes they think, oh my God, are they crazy! That may be your first reaction, but I think most of us feel that there is a lot that goes on between those two people with which we can identify. Intimate relationships are very complicated that way, they *are* power transactions. You are dependent on each other, you are trying to manipulate each other, you love each other, you hate each other. All of those things are happening on top of each other.

Now in America, which is such an open society, we claim that we admit everything, but the fact is that we admit very little. People are frightened to see another person reveal that much about themselves, apparently without shame. It is very upsetting for some people to think that Mrs. Beale does not mind having her sagging flesh out there on the screen. I have heard old women say that it is not decent, and how could you be so cruel to show the flesh hanging off her arm. Well, as a matter of fact, the flesh *is* hanging off her arm, and Little Edie's reaction to remarks like that was, "Well, if you are 58 and your thighs are going flabby, too, that is how it is."

It is hard for people to accept that you can say something that was really deeply cruel to someone, and then say, "By the way, please, pass the sugar." The sugar is passed and life goes on. And if in *vérité* you can really begin to show people that that *is* how life is lived and that people *survive* that experience, I think that is a very political thing to do, a very important thing to do.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

Invaders and Encampments: The Films of Philip Kaufman

Despite all the serious film criticism which has been published in America during the past fifteen years, important artists continue to be neglected—none more so than Philip Kaufman. During these same fifteen years, he has managed to make five distinctive movies—*Goldstein, Fearless Frank, The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid, The White Dawn,* and now *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—in the teeth of all the setbacks and agonies which the American studio establishment customarily inflicts on original film artists: indifference, blundering interference, inept distribution, firing—the lot. A European of his ability and achievements would be able to work as steadily as Truffaut or Chabrol or Fassbinder or Bertolucci or Herzog or even Rivette. But in America, as John Houseman has said, they dare you to make movies.

A Chicagoan, Kaufman spent a year at Harvard Law School, took a degree in American history from the University of Chicago, and tried novel-writing for a while during the early sixties. Along with his wife, Rose (who has worked and acted in some of his films and wrote the first-draft screenplay of his next one, *The Wanderers*), he lived in California for a time, then spent a couple of years in Europe and Israel, where he taught some English, read, wrote, studied, and saw key movies—not just the first fruits of the New Wave but early films by Pier Paolo Pasolini and two famous American independent features, *Shadows* and *The Connection*. Convinced that more movies like these could be made in America despite Hollywood's closed doors, he returned to Chicago, studied the standard film-making textbooks, shot with a hired cameraman to get first-hand experience. Then he and Benjamin Manaster wrote and directed *Goldstein* together on a budget of $50,000, after which he raised another $150,000 and made *Fearless Frank* by himself under the title *Frank's Greatest Adventure*.

Although these films were shown to some acclaim at the Cannes festivals of 1964 and 1967, neither got much attention in the United States, where major studio distribution is almost mandatory for extensive showings. A now-defunct company got a few bookings for *Goldstein*, but *Frank*

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went begging. Kaufman remembers carrying it around New York in tin cans, dickering without an agent with distributors who would tie up the film for months at a time before rejecting it. Finally, it had to settle for a quickie release by American International, double-billed with an obscure Dustin Hoffman item called *Madigan's Millions* after he and *Frank*'s star, Jon Voight, scored a mutual hit in *Midnight Cowboy*. The movie did, however, win Kaufman a contract with Universal. But when, after many false starts, he succeeded in making *Northfield* there, the studio tried in vain to recut it into another *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, then tossed it away with almost no publicity in 1972. Two years later, Paramount followed suit with *The White Dawn*. Then, wanting to make another Western, Kaufman accepted an offer from Clint Eastwood to write and direct *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. But, after about two weeks of shooting in October, 1975, Eastwood fired him. Why this happened remains unclear. Eastwood's explanations have been vague, and Kaufman continues not to comment either publicly or privately. Reportedly, Eastwood reshot at least some of Kaufman's footage. But Kaufman cannot verify this because he has not seen the finished film, although he retains its screenwriting credit (along with another writer who prepared an earlier draft of its screenplay). This brutal shock, which many other film artists have also undergone, cost Kaufman, who needed a box-office hit, a virtually certain one, given Eastwood's track record. For quite a while, he feared that his career might be over. Stories like these are routine in the history of American film; today, they are virtually inevitable if a Hollywood film has any strangeness or originality to it. Along with across-the-board neglect from most critics, they explain how, after years of dedicated effort, Philip Kaufman has attained the title of America's most talented unknown director.

GOLDSTEIN— The Elijah of Lake Michigan

Maybe there is another reason why *Goldstein* has been neglected. Reduced to its premise (an old man rises from the depths of Lake Michigan and ambles through Chicago, changing the lives of three misfits before returning to the water), it sounds ominously Poetic, Sensitive, Symbolic, Profound. Besides its vaguely Biblical coot, the movie's characters include an Artist as well, a sculptor of junk metal who obtains his raw materials from that all-purpose symbol of contemporary anomie, an automobile graveyard straight out of *Mickey One* (also filmed in Chicago and released in 1964). But *Goldstein* takes away the capital letters; fleet and graceful, it makes airy sport of pseudo-profundity and achieves a genuine poetry of motion. All kinds of movement—walking, running, dancing—animate it. The sculptor and his girlfriend, Sally, begin by grimly stalking the city as they wordlessly break up. Then, after she learns of her pregnancy from a daffy doctor with a Groucho mustache (who cheerfully adds, "You goofed, you blew it"), her depressed meanderings take her to a greasy spoon where a light-minded nutburger bops around and comes on to the customers like a gunman. The rest of the movie comically follows them on their crooked, occasionally intersecting paths in search of the secret of life, or at least a little novocaine.

At first, when the old man waddles into the city, we expect him to become their messiah and wonder if the movie (apparently based on one of Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hassidim*) will lapse into platitudes. But his scruffy bum's bearded face makes him look more like that Little Old Winemaker, Me than Elijah. Soon he is pissing against a wall, guzzling a drink from a hydrant, blithely pushing a violinist through heavy traffic in a wicker wheelchair—a pleasantly outrageous set of images recasting a Biblical divine as a scraggly, impudent derelict. The movie works this spirit of parody into its texture, especially its playful games with mattes, cartoon sound effects, and fast-motion photography. Beautifully turning the restrictions of an ultra-low budget to its advantage, *Goldstein* employs remarkably vital black-and-white photography and eccentric angles to make Chicago a spooky, glittering moonscape. The absence of synchronized dialogue in some scenes gives the performances a touch of silent film miming (the actors include Lou Gilbert in the title role, Ellen Madison, Thomas Erhart, Ben Carruthers, Severn Darden, and Anthony Holland) which deftly enhances the prevailing tone of

Kaufman (right) shooting BODY SNATCHERS

whimsical fantasy. Weirdly tunnel-visioned flakes keep appearing: the rent-a-cop who blows his cork when Goldstein slurps his soup in a café, tries to steam him to death in a slaughterhouse, and ends up a string of sausages; the yardworker who nibbles a bit of this cop weiner while musing about his dream of opening a pizza palace. By enjoying to the hilt the jokes, strange details, light, and the passing parade of mixed nuts swept up in the wake of the pellmell old man, *Goldstein* subtly undercuts the life-denying obsessiveness of the Truth Seeker. The codger's one gnomic utterance—"If ya don't watch out, they'll dance ya down the street"—makes the sculptor take him for a sage. But, like Nelson Algren's twisting anecdote about Lost Ball Stahooska and his bad conscience, it really spoofs heavy, overbearing Meaning.

Sally gets an abortion from a crackpot. The sculptor combs the city for his new-found guru. Jay the café nut, a friend of his, tags along for a while, then gets bored and goes on a spree with a stolen credit card. In a characteristic Kaufman scene, tinctured with a dream-like aura of magic and transience, Jay, waking up in a plush salon amid sleek showgirls who look like glossy pop Valkyries, momentarily thinks that he has gone to some gauzy, stoned heaven, like *Northfield*'s Cole Younger dozing with the remnants of his gang in a doll-festooned parlor. "You mean it's over?" he murmurs wonderingly as he slips away, bestowing courtly compliments. That's as close as anyone, including the audience, comes to an Answer in the film because, refreshingly, the old man couldn't care less about playing guru. Even though, like Jesse James in *Northfield,* he is a Kaufman invader-guerrilla, he never announces any motive for his sortie, and neither does the movie. Whether littering the freeway from a truck or skipping along a hilltop like an animated pen-and-ink drawing, he just cuts an antic swath through the community for the sheer hell of it, looking no more bizarre than many of its disconnected inhabitants, unnoticed by most of them, and not giving a damn one way or the other.

By the time he has danced back to the lake along a stone jetty, a wistful, elusive vision is tentatively blossoming: footloose, isolated screwballs wandering the byways of the city, *almost* finding each other and then doing . . . what? The question not only goes unanswered, it goes unasked, yet the inchoate suggestiveness of the possibility resonates back through the whole movie. After Goldstein vanishes, leaving his hat floating on the water (a stunning image), the film catches up with the running sculptor, who tumbles, exhausted yet serene, into a patch of reeds. The journey not the arrival matters, as Leonard Woolf titled his autobiography; this flukey, borderline movie says the same thing memorably by not saying it at all.

FEARLESS FRANK—
To Do Good, One Must Fight Evil

Another Kaufman invader, a hayseed farmboy numbskull, sets out for the Big City to make his

fortune but swiftly falls for a voluptuous gun moll and gets fatally perforated trying to save her from the clutches of The Boss and his degenerate henchmen, The Rat, The Cat, Screwnose, and Needles. But The Good Doctor, delighted by the corpse's blankly idiotic face, regenerates him as a puppet Superman and sends him out to pulverize the Scum once and for all. *Fearless Frank* is a live-action comic strip which uses a lunkhead Man of Steel to satirize America's superhero mythology, with its penchant for worldwide do-gooding, its insistence on rigid distinctions between good and evil, its veneration of innocence and naïveté. The Vietnam War, which had not yet reached its full fury when this movie was made, served as Kaufman's inspiration. "We were in Vietnam," he recently commented, "because of our comic book mentality, scouring the streets of the world to root out evil"—and so often creating greater evil.

But the film never mentions Vietnam. Instead, it employs a battery of distancing effects derived from the conventions of comic strips in order to undermine their simplistic morality. Behind the opening credits, panels in the style of Roy Lichtenstein lay out the movie's plot in advance. The characters, especially the Dick Tracy-ish villains, all but sprout balloons overhead every time they open their mouths. The color photography runs to bright primaries which separate the figures from their backgrounds like cut-outs. The blatant acting goes for pie-in-the-face gestures and readings. Even the frequently primitive special effects, a consequence of underproduction, contribute witty effects, such as the comic moment when the cretinous Frank, amazed to discover that he is actually flying, ripples his arms like a swimmer. Like episodes of cliffhanging thirties serials, *Fearless Frank* is full of Rube Goldberg gizmos: secret transmitters, an occult amulet, a doomsday machine. One character, The Storyteller, narrates and comments from time to time, even speaking the lines of the last sequence ahead of the characters. Collectively, these devices put quotation marks around the entire film.

As a result, Frank's feats of evil-fighting never become suspenseful or exciting. When, for instance, he catches The Rat stealing dinosaur bones from a museum and knocks him all the way to jail with one thunder punch, spastic fast-motion photography and pulpy narration take away the scene's adrenalin and direct our attention to Frank's dumb posturing instead. All of the film's freshest touches are similarly stylized: Frank's ideal love, Plethora, crooning a torch song in a dive while hood waiters serve smoke to the immobilized guests and rifle their pockets; the imprisoned Cat clawing right into a telephoto lens; the flash-cut POW! WHAM! which covers Frank's sexual initiation. Like *Goldstein, Fearless Frank* stresses a sense of slinky toy playfulness which mocks the puritanical evil fighter just as it does the blinkered truth seeker in *Goldstein,* the avenging guerrilla in *Northfield,* the hostile whaler in *The White Dawn,* and the frigid pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.*

As Frank grows arrogant, the plot of the 78-minute film gets dizzyingly intricate. Evil doppelgangers spring up: The Good Doctor's Evil Brother and Frank's inverted clone, False Frank (two parts apiece for Severn Darden and Jon Voight). By fighting dirty, Frank kayoes False Frank; but the victory only swells his conceit and brings about his second death, which Kaufman renders in a startling three-shot montage of his corpse in its original gutter, his empty clothes, and finally a gust of leaves. Completing the role reversal, False Frank turns Good, wipes out The Boss, and (in an image too reminiscent of *Goldstein*) sinks disillusioned into Lake Michigan. But then Kaufman adds an unexpected final shot: False Frank drifting down the river of Frank's past in a rowboat, accompanied by the other surviving characters. The image vibrates with overtones: abandonment of overweening pride, petulant renunciation of life, the wound of experience, the lingering allure of innocence, creatures of fiction yielding their stage. Anticipating a similar image in *Celine and Julie go Boating* by some six years, this tantalizing, romantic conclusion gives the film a remarkably poignant aftertaste.

However, *Fearless Frank,* for all its fascinating ambitions and strategies, does stretch itself too thin. The performances tend to be ruptured overplaying of roles which break down into shtiks. At this stage of his career, Kaufman could not yet coax from his cast the nuanced comic acting which lights up his next three films. And his

genre-mocking gags, especially the parody of *Frankenstein,* now look fairly stale, partly, no doubt, because of all the other movies of the last decade which have run them into the ground. Eleven years after it was made, *Fearless Frank* looks like a transitional curiosity.

THE GREAT NORTHFIELD MINNESOTA RAID— Guerrillas and Wonderments

More than six years after its premiere, *Northfield* remains perhaps the most scandalously overlooked American film of the seventies; even revival theaters continue to slight it. Can it be that a Western which does not fit neatly into either the classical or the revisionist niches is still too much for audiences? In this lively comedy about the final raid of the Jesse James-Cole Younger gang in 1876, Kaufman neither sentimentalizes these outlaws as folklore heroes driven to banditry by social injustice nor decks them out in ostentatious parallels to modern criminality. Instead, he uses them to whip up an album of comic, melodramatic, emotional, sensual delights, a flip-the-pages, popeyed look at demented American "wonderments." With its fizzy, volatile cocktail of surprising twists and moods, the film ends up demonstrating that its warty, eccentric, stumblebum versions of the gang members are far more interesting than any of the dime-novel myths which have sprung up around their exploits. But perhaps being obliged to abandon even legends this remote is too jarring for some people. It certainly was for the Universal executive who, confronted with a fact-based episode in the film's rough cut which showed Jesse enjoying the chance to play spy in women's clothes during the Civil War, angrily ordered it cut. Which may explain why the first sentence of Kaufman's Ned Buntline narration, "They were the greatest outlaws," is spoken over the Universal logo.

Exchanging Chicago fantasylands for history, Kaufman enriches his preoccupation with freebooting restlessness and restful settlements by creating his first detailed portrait of a community. In a treatment entitled "The Great Northfield Raid" and dated September 9, 1968, he writes,

GREAT NORTHFIELD MINNESOTA RAID

"Northfield is a town built on the assumption that History will never visit there." Nothing close to this line is ever spoken in the movie, but the very look of its Northfield (recreated in Oregon) bears the comment out. A rambling conglomeration of clapboard shanties, dusty roads, and half-educated citizens, the town still managed to have a pristine, faintly Arcadian tinge as well which emerges in the dappled, warm browns and greens of Bruce Surtees's cinematography. Contrasting with this ambiance is a streak of all-American wildness not quite snuffed out by advancing respectability. Bizarre crackpots keep popping up here, too: the community pillar who waves the ear he has sliced off a captured outlaw; the grief-crazed old Swede still keening for the son he lost to the Civil War; the undertaking Uriah Heep posing saturninely for a daguerrotype between two well-riddled bodies; foolish teams ineptly trying to play the newly invented game of baseball; the moneybags who is packing his bank vault with rocks and stealing the depositors' gold. Even the most placid, mundane townspeople seem to be secretly twitching with arcane quirks, just like the outlaws with their mule-tail mustaches, superstitious earrings, and Bible-banging piety. Throughout the film, the distinction between them gradually vanishes. We even sense that the townspeople are unconsciously grateful for the gang's invasion because it gives them the perfect excuse to cut loose with their suppressed nuttiness and violence. As they chase the outlaws, bombarding one with stones, erroneously yet happily shooting at each other, this unassuming patch of American heartland suddenly becomes a blooming garden of weirdness. Kaufman has a special gift for relishing addled obsessions, *idées fixes,* and monomaniacal stupidity without the slightest

patronization; his light touch makes them exhilarating riffs on the querulous, moonstruck idiocy latent in even the most stolid people. *Northfield* is a merry-go-round of American anarchists and lunatics gleefully running amok.

The mainspring of the movie is its contrast between Cole and Jesse. An amiable raconteur encased in a sheath of bulletproof leather, Cole does not really want to invade Northfield; in the treatment, he even refuses to ride with the gang until his neighbors shame him into it. In the film, he reluctantly takes part in the robbery only for bribe money which will get some pesky politicians off his back. He embodies the movie's casual yet sensual enjoyment of even the most commonplace elements of daily life; he no longer needs adventure or fantasies of playing frontier Robin Hood. Jesse, on the other hand, has vanished into them. His favorite word is "veeshon," and he is constantly falling into the crazed visions of anti-Yankee vengeance which are his whole motivation in life even ten years after the Civil War is over. When he first imagines the Northfield raid, babbling entranced about "a place called the North," Kaufman's alert cutting from side to full-face close-ups captures with particular force his bug-eyed, holy-rolling insanity. "I think what I did with Jesse," he has stated, "is a study of a type of character who is very contemporary. He's involved with a cause, and he's both demented and charming; he feels no guilt for anything because of his involvement with the cause."

But, instead of insisting on this comparison in the film, he and Robert Duvall concentrate on pungently conjuring up this weaselly, manic, utterly brainless, often hilarious, coldly deadly poltergeist from the depths of the American psyche. The film portrays him as a protean, scary gargoyle who is ultimately unfathomable. Even at the end, when he is escaping the region disguised as a doll-collecting widow whom he has wantonly murdered, the movie still has a sharp eye for his leering strangeness, as Kaufman's characteristically nimble pacing whirls him off toward his fatal encounter with Bob Ford. Only by implication, not editorializing, do we finally view him as a sham redneck legend frozen in outdated fanaticism.

◀ Great Northfield Minnesota Raid

Cole is not really much smarter, but he does have an astonished curiosity about life which saves him from this purblind dementia. The movie's view of America as a three-ring circus of bewildering but funny change is also his view; he is forever getting sidetracked by his interest in some new sight or gadget. Unlike Jesse, he can respond to fresh experience with an open heart; and that is why, even shackled and caged, he can still win cockeyed glory by staggering to his feet and flaunting his pitted leather cuirass to the townspeople, turning himself into an oddball American wonderment, too, as they cheer and we gape. His generous goofiness sums up the film's bemused, undoctrinaire exploration of America's craziest contradictions, especially the bewildering distance between its outsized heroic myths and the common clay from which it insists on molding its heroes.

THE WHITE DAWN— A Dream of Community

Kaufman developed his first three films from scratch; *The White Dawn,* based on a novel by James Houston, was his first outside assignment, but he shaped it to the measure of his own interests. Derived from actual events, the plot deals with the clash of cultures which inexorably arises when Eskimos of Baffin Island rescue and shelter three survivors—Billy (Warren Oates), Daggett (Timothy Bottoms), and Portagee (Lou Gossett)—of a whaling accident in Spring, 1896. Except for these professional actors, the cast consists of Eskimos, all but one inhabitants of the film's Arctic locations, which lie some 300 miles northeast of Robert Flaherty's base camp for *Nanook of the North.* During casting, the role of the

tribal chief, Sarkak, was offered to Takashi Shimura, the star of Kurosawa's *Ikiru,* but his health would not permit him to accept it. When another Japanese actor proved unsatisfactory to Kaufman and the Eskimos after a few days of shooting, one of them, Simonie Kopapik, inherited the part. Like his companions, he had never acted, yet he does a fine job. All the Eskimos, whose language dominates the sound track, joined their American colleagues in playing not themselves but *fictionalized* characters. Yet the film was saddled with labels like "documentary" or "ethnographic" when it was first released, as though a movie about Eskimos could be nothing else. This false situation must have made many prospective viewers expect a boring "National Geographic" travelogue, instead of a vigorously lyrical adventure film.

In *The White Dawn,* Kaufman creates his most serene, alluring image of communal solidarity to date. After a black-and-white prologue showing the whalers' accident (accompanied by readings from the log of their ship which feature a tolling nautical motif, "So ends this day"), the film cuts to almost blinding color vistas of the intimidating world in which the Eskimos, daily risking death for the barest necessities of survival, must live in terrifying intimacy with every flux of the seasons. Houston, who shared this way of life for twelve years as both an explorer for Eskimo art and as a Canadian civil administrator, makes a crippled, semi-outcast boy (barely visible in the film) the narrator of his novel. In one typical moment, eavesdropping on a sexual encounter between Daggett and an Eskimo girl, the boy says, "Then I saw for the first time in my life the thing that foreigners do with women." It takes a moment's puzzlement for the reader to realize that he is witnessing a kiss, an act which Eskimos do not perform. This sort of displacement, which occurs on virtually every page of the novel, forces us to perceive our mores as we would those of the Eskimos if one of the whalers were the narrator; our concepts of familiarity and foreignness get stood on end. The film cannot precisely reproduce this effect; perhaps only a film by an Eskimo director could approach it. Instead, Kaufman begins by focussing on the fear of the whalers as huskies and sleds slash into the frame near their fallen bodies, as they find themselves transported to igloos which steam with musky perfumes, opaque rituals, and unusual foods. Then he evokes their despair at the specter of perpetual entrapment in this wilderness and their ambivalence when, despite its cruel hardships, the life of the Eskimos begins to weave a spell on them.

The White Dawn offers a moving, comprehensive vision of Eskimo culture not as it exists today but at the last trembling moment before its fragile integrity was irreparably damaged. The film highlights the ways that the Eskimos personalize their surroundings with an elaborate constellation of lovely rites. In one unusually striking scene, the hunter Kangiak shows Daggett, the most receptive of the whalers to the Eskimo ethos, how to spit water into the mouth of a harpooned seal who, he believes, has delivered itself to them to slake its thirst. The film captures primal images of terror, like the duel between Sarkak and a rearing monster of a polar bear, and harmony, such as the joyful shots of Daggett and Kangiak returning from a hunt draped in snowy geese. *The White Dawn* continuously enriches its documentary elements by pursuing a fundamental yearning of all people for a nurturing, permanent haven. The film's imagery of ice floes and snowscapes, even though Kaufman typically does not trade on their connotations, does suggest a bedrock, utopian purity which civilization and its discontents cannot hope to attain. The ideal of transcendental human devotion emerges through the movie's portrait of Eskimo sexual life. The shots of nude, fleshy families piled side-by-side together in the igloos, old and young alike snuggled beneath mounds of fur, have a quality of almost sybaritic sensuality that is absolutely irresistible. Combined with the grandeur of the Eskimos' seasonal migrations, they fill us with longing for what contemporary life seems incapable of providing.

The three whalers are also tempted, but they react to the temptation in different ways. The mild, withdrawn Daggett eventually realizes that he no longer wants to return home. Growling and scheming, Billy holds the Eskimos in contempt and never stops trying to flee. Portagee, relaxed and practical, shares Billy's attitudes but not his bile. Summing up the whalers this way indicates

the film's major shortcoming: the inability of these characters to get past the status of types representing the flaws of civilized men. Despite the film's noble imagery, these interlopers are more interesting for their plight than for their personalities. The result is that the tragic ending, though still affecting, is fairly predictable. To reach its fullest potential, the material really needs at least one character like T. E. Lawrence, seeking exaltation by losing himself in an alien world, or Joseph Conrad's Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands,* terrorized and haunted by the primitive life which traps him, or Fred C. Dobbs of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,* with his beady-eyed madness—or maybe all three.

But, although Kaufman's treatment of the Eskimos often recalls Arthur Penn's presentation of the Cheyenne in *Little Big Man* by their own self-descriptive term, "the human beings," *The White Dawn* avoids the self-hating anti-Americanism to which Penn surrenders. Kaufman indicates instead that the Eskimos are as flawed as the Americans are. Superstitiously viewing the whalers as the offspring of dogs, the tribesmen blame them unjustly for every misfortune which arises during their stay. The shaman who periodically visits the settlement is a wily trickster using hocus pocus to exploit fears and wrest influence from Sarkak. When Sarkak loses some of his dictatorial control over tribal life, he vengefully abandons his people. *The White Dawn* shows that, to borrow another phrase from *Little Big Man,* neither the whalers nor the Eskimos has any firm purchase on "where the center of the earth is." Reversing the invader-community dynamic of his previous films, Kaufman now portrays an entire community which must wander endlessly, a community essentially identical to the shipboard world of the whalers. When an Eskimo girl, bemoaning the death of her grandmother from starvation, cries out to silent gods, "We are powerless to change life," she cuts to the heart of the matter for everyone, primitive or civilized. Only superficially is *The White Dawn* just a critique of civilized values. On a deeper level, it is a lamentation for the incurable isolation of all human beings one from another in the vast, chill emptiness of the universe.

THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES—A Note on a Lost Opportunity

There is no use in exhaustively analyzing *Josey Wales* in this context, but a point or two seems worth making. Adapted from Forrest Carter's novel, *Gone to Texas*, about a Southern farmer burning to avenge the slaughter of his family during the Civil War, this big Western, despite lugubrious pacing which makes it at least twenty minutes too long, is easily director Eastwood's best film, largely because it has qualities undetectable in his other work: the sneaky humor of Chief Dan George's old Cherokee, the gathering of companions around Josey as he rides ever deeper into the West, the emphasis on the help which even this feral gunfighter needs from them to survive several perilous situations, the mellowing of Eastwood's cement-faced persona. All of these are Kaufman touches. A reading of two of his script drafts indicates that, however they disagreed, Eastwood followed both his outline and his dialogue closely. Josey Wales, like Jesse James a Confederate guerrilla who keeps on raiding compulsively after the fall of the South, reads as an intriguing variation on Kaufman's invader, for this time the marauder is forced to become a fugitive. Under Eastwood's direction, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* keeps a decent grip on this theme. But whatever it might have been was lost when they trotted out that trade-paper euphemism, "creative differences."

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS—Pod City

Kaufman's reworking of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* turns out to be a colorful, live-wire science fiction horror show, pulsating from start to finish with his zest for moviemaking, even though it is only nominally the first remake of Don Siegel's 1956 version. Countless potboilers of the fifties also showed spores and demons from space secretly usurping human bodies, killing their souls, and making them over into compliant zombies. More recent movies have updated this premise. *The Stepford Wives* ploddingly adds a women's lib-male backlash topspin by making

WHITE DAWN

the monsters suburban husbands who transform their creative mates into robot wifeys. Adding nuclear disaster and cannibalism to the brew, *Night of the Living Dead* goes for flat-out ghoulishness. Recently, the Austrian avant-gardist Valie Export did her own version of the Siegel movie, *Invisible Adversaries,* featuring another liberated woman who is sure that a malign force she calls "the Hyksos" is imperceptibly replacing the entire population of Vienna. Jacques Rivette's *Paris Nous Appartient* never reveals whether or not the nameless conspiracy which terrifies its characters (one of them named Philip Kaufman) really exists. But Siegel's B-classic is the new film's real ancestor. Shrewdly, Kaufman has outflanked its cultists by casting both Siegel himself and Siegel's star, Kevin McCarthy, in the remake, Siegel as a pod cabbie, McCarthy as his original character, still shouting, "You're next!" in a tribute to the ending of the first film, which timid producers watered down.

The plots of both movies generally follow their common source, Jack Finney's novel *The Body Snatchers.* But Kaufman has moved the action from a small California town to San Francisco. In a role analogous to McCarthy's country doctor, Donald Sutherland plays an inspector for the city's board of health. In place of McCarthy's girlfriend (Dana Wynter), Brooke Adams, the female lead in *Days of Heaven,* is a colleague and friend of Sutherland's who kicks off the plot by announcing that her lover has changed. Siegel's main supporting characters (Carolyn Jones and Richard Carlson), who find a half-formed pod creature on their pool table, have become an egotistical writer (Jeff Goldblum) and his wife (Veronica Cartwright), who find it on a massage table in their mud bath parlor. Siegel's *Body Snatchers* is probably the best movie child of fifties paranoia; though he compared his pods to producers, they also symbolized Communists for McCarthyites and conformists for the left—and they remain all-purpose bogeymen. Kaufman has given the paranoia up-to-the-minute referents. When Adams keeps insisting on the change in her lover even though she cannot pinpoint it, a pop Dr. Fixit (Leonard Nimoy) links her feeling to modern sexual mores and transient living arrangements. His brand of psychobabble becomes another, more amusing, symptom of creeping poddom, and Cartwright adds still another when she complains about junk food.

In each movie, emotional response to life is what barely distinguishes pods from people. For a few reels, Kaufman, like Siegel, is able to have some creepy fun befuddling us about which is which before shifting the basis of suspense to the fates of the protagonists. Also basic to the material is the insidious attraction of numbness, which kills the agonies of love and vulnerability. In each version of the story, including the novel, nearly everyone yields easily, even gratefully, to emotional narcosis. The secret, subtle *coup d'état* by the pods serves as a metaphor for the manifold

pressures which life brings upon people to abandon that ambiguous blessing, humanity. Kaufman's treatment of the story inverts *Northfield,* whose populace can be viewed as incipient pods until the invasion of the outlaws triggers their hidden looniness. In *Body Snatchers,* he presents a scrambling, manic metropolis which seems to harbor the repressed desire to go blissfully catatonic even before the pods arrive.

Like Rivette and Godard with Paris, Kaufman has turned a city noted for its special beauty into an Alphaville of rampant fear—overheated, tenebrous, clammy. Unlike Siegel, who waits a while before revealing where the pods come from, he begins with shots of them massing on a distant planet, then drifting through the void to infiltrate the city by riding its rain and blossoming on its greenery. Visually, the movies couldn't differ more. Siegel's unadorned black-and-white has yielded to Kaufman's lyrical color, tilts, handheld shots, and high key lighting. Michael Chapman's photography (he also shot *The White Dawn*) is both lustrous and penumbral, with deep shadows and crowded, mobile frames. Annexing the genre's salient mood of engulfing dread, he has made the new *Body Snatchers* a *film noir* in color. Kaufman's pods, too, are more elaborate than Siegel's; they send out tendrils to ensnare sleepers and expel their clones like fetuses. The editing by Douglas Stewart (also the cutter of *Northfield* and *The White Dawn*) foments a constant aura of edgy malaise, especially when Sutherland, trying to complete a call on a public phone, keeps flashing on himself lurching through passersby who may already be pods.

The movie's Dolby-encoded sound track is also a masterful achievement. The Dolby process enables sound effects to achieve unprecedented resonance and depth. A great many directors of rock and disco movies, intent on pounding their audiences with nonstop blasts of music, Dolby-ize their sound mixes indiscriminately, ending up with stereophonic blobs of noise. Kaufman and his team have painstakingly selected the sounds that they wanted to heighten in order to create dense, yet articulately layered montages of both effects and music (a plangent atonal score by Denny Zietlin, a composer new to movies). Some of the most arresting sounds, like the throaty, hollow bellow of the pods when they detect an unconverted human being, were created in the lab. Among recent films, only *Days of Heaven* has used Dolby so creatively.

Stylistically, then, Kaufman's movie is far richer than Siegel's, with a full panoply of virtuoso moments and sequences: a publication party whose eddies of spite, conviviality, and idle conversation are gradually infested with paranoia; a quick cut to a podded dog wearing its master's face; Sutherland's fiery assault on a pod factory. Most memorable of all is Sutherland's elated run toward a ghostly freighter, eerily green-toned at night anchorage and awash in soaring bagpipe airs, only to find it full of pods—an eloquent image of salvation harshly annihilated. At the same time, the film sustains a spirit of teasing wit: a health bureaucrat proudly flaunting a rat, a mud bather displaying his Velikovsky book, the airport loudspeaker voice herding pod distributors into their trucks. Sutherland deploys his lankiness and his slightly diffident air more robustly than ever before, and Adams draws us close with her upside-down smile and her warm contralto. Kaufman has made their ripening love a quiet undertone of scenes ostensibly designed to make story points, so that by the time they declare themselves passionately to each other, the surge of endangered emotion is all the more affecting. Cartwright's darting tension and Goldblum's witty feeling for the flannel-mouthed, basking narcissism of glib hustlers and jumpy neurotics both add more layers of crotchety, irritating, yet precious idiosyncrasy to the material. Kaufman has blended this complex of devices and talents

◀ INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

into a vivid summation of all that the pods are striving to eliminate.

But the movie cannot escape the innate limits of its premise. Though many creative B-pictures have capitalized on their lack of respectability (despite years of critical spade work on them) by mining their offbeat plots without middlebrow or even high cultural pretensions, the clever grabbiness of even the most striking B-picture ideas is also a hindrance to full thematic richness. While the basic gimmick of *Body Snatchers,* raiders from another world, does allow it to envision the full horror of an earth where only the husks of human beings remain, it also diminishes the implications of this horror. If it is an overpowering force from another world which turns humanity into pod-zombies, then it follows that humanity is not at all responsible if it goes numb. Yet we all know that our world is full of people who are, in effect, living in the pod-state—and by their own choice. They have made themselves pods. Tied to the notion of alien forces who render people helpless victims, the *Body Snatchers* premise cannot entirely come to grips with humanity's lurking fascination with emotional deadness. Nor can it quite grasp the mordant possibility that it is not space pods but life itself which can make people numb, grind down their humanity, deaden them.

Furthermore, the differing personalities of the two directors cause an intriguing anomaly in their approaches to one significant story element. Each film, as their shared plot requires, contains a scene which gives the pods the chance to justify themselves by explaining the advantages of giving up humanity's emotionalism. But Siegel allows their spokesmen more eloquence than Kaufman does. Siegel's films frequently display a sneaking fascination with the pod state. For example, his recent Charles Bronson thriller, *Telefon,* has pod people whom a mastermind can turn into suicide bombs at will. And what is Dirty Harry but a pod cop? Kaufman finds the pod state unambivalently repellent, as the swarming human life and his infectious enjoyment of it in each of his films testifies. But, to some degree, Siegel finds it attractive. As a result, the misanthropic Siegel gains some dramatic advantage over the humanistic Kaufman in treating this implication of the material. Siegel's talent is perfectly attuned to B-material, which means that, though he can't transcend it either, he can wring from it an extra nuance of horror which may be inaccessible to the richer, more profound talent of a director like Philip Kaufman. It just goes to show that, even though he has made a handsome, gripping *Body Snatchers,* he does require a different kind of place in which to draw his deepest breaths.

Donald Sutherland and Brooke Adams in INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

Invasion of the Body Snatchers may win that place for him; early indications are that it will be the first Kaufman film to receive a full American release and generous studio support (from United Artists, in this case). In the meantime, he has been shooting *The Wanderers,* a long-nurtured adaptation of Richard Price's novel about gangs of the Bronx, circa 1963. By the time this movie opens next summer, Kaufman may have come of age commercially. Regardless, he has long since done so artistically. It is time and past time for attention to be paid.

GRAHAM PETRIE

Paul Fejos in America

The period between 1926 and 1931 is probably the least known, the least understood, and the least sympathetically considered in the whole history of American cinema. Most film historians present 1927 as the apogee of "pure" silent cinema, with such works as *The General, The Kid Brother, Long Pants, Seventh Heaven, Underworld, The Cat and the Canary, Wings,* and, above all, *Sunrise.* 1928–29 is seen as a period of chaos and transition, as studios scramble over themselves to adapt to sound: it is the period of a few last silent masterpieces, the uncomfortable hybrid of the "part-talkie," and the early, static, stage-bound full talkies. Redemption is assumed to occur in 1930–31, as directors find ways to overcome the limitations of the primitive sound systems and begin to restore to the camera and the Moviola some of their previous flexibility and freedom. Here the ritual names are those of Lubitsch and Mamoulian.

In orthodox accounts of this period, the same names, the same titles, and the same anecdotes occur with depressing regularity. In the process, whole careers, and important stages of development in the work of significant artists, have vanished almost without trace. Certainly, any study of this period is crucially affected by the fact that so many important films are lost, destroyed, inaccessibly tucked away in vaults and archives ranging from California to Moscow, or, where they can be viewed, are to be found only in single, often mutilated, archive copies. Even with the fashionable immigrant directors of the period, Murnau's *Four Devils,* Lubitsch's *The Patriot,* and important films by Sjöström and Stiller are not at the moment available for study in any form.

Even granting this, it remains astonishing that most film histories, even today, pay virtually no attention to the work in this period of such men as William K. Howard, Gregory La Cava, W. S. Van Dyke, Harry D'Arrabie D'Arrast, Monta Bell, and Malcolm St. Clair, all of whom made several films of outstanding quality and importance, but who might as well not even have existed for all the attention they receive. Whether one looks at their films in the framework of individual careers, studio history, or genre study, they possess undeniable significance and even a brief acquaintance with them would shake up some of the received opinions and blind dogmas relating to this period. In the field of sexual comedy, for example, such films as *A Gentleman of Paris, The Grand Duchess and the Waiter,* and *Man, Woman, and Sin,* besides continuing to sparkle and delight for their own sake, throw into new relief Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* and the films of Lubitsch.

The director who has suffered most from this neglect (mainly because his American career falls completely into the 1923–31 framework) is probably the Hungarian-born Paul Fejos—though there have recently been signs of a welcome revival of interest in his work. Few people today have even heard of Fejos and yet his first two American films, *The Last Moment* and *Lonesome,* were among the most highly praised of 1928, appearing on many ten-best lists; he became, for a brief period in 1928–30, the top director at Universal; and, while working on the musical *Broadway* in 1929, he and his cameraman Hal Mohr designed a crane that allowed him to move the camera across a vast set with complete freedom and mobility (thus making nonsense, incidentally, of the still widely held belief that Lubitsch, in *The Love Parade,* and Mamoulian, in *Applause,* were the first directors of talkies to employ extensive camera movements).[1] Short as it was, his American career is of considerable importance, and it produced at least one film, *Lonesome,* that deserves to be considered as one of the classics of the period.

Fejos was born in Budapest in 1897, of a family of landed aristocrats whose ancestry went back to the fifteenth century.[2] He went to medical school, obtaining his degree, and fought in World War I both in the cavalry and the air force. After the war, he returned to his first love, theater, and then di-

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rected half a dozen feature length films between 1920 and 1923, all of them now irrevocably lost. (Two other prominent Hungarian directors at this time were Alexander Korda and Michael Curtiz.) In 1923 he left Hungary for America, for a combination of reasons, among them a distaste for the reactionary government that had replaced the brief Communist-led régime of 1919-20, and a curiosity about the United States that had persisted since his childhood. After a period of unemployment and acute poverty, he managed to talk his way into a job as laboratory assistant at the Rockefeller Institute and then into some theater work in New York. He became obsessed, however, with the idea of working in Hollywod and set off for California in 1926 where, once again, poverty and some medical work for Los Angeles hospitals followed, though he apparently also wrote some scripts for Hollywood Westerns.

Fejos's own story of what happened next tended to vary from telling to telling—he was a great *raconteur* who could not help embellishing, and even inventing, whole episodes of his life for the entertainment of his listeners. In essence, however, he somehow met up with a young man called Edward M. Spitz who had $5000 that he wanted to invest in a film and was looking for a director and a script. Fejos managed to persuade Georgia Hale (of Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*) to work for him for nothing, but only on days when she had no other commitments. He then rented studio space on an hourly, rather than a daily basis, undertaking to use whatever sets happened to be available at the time as background for other films. He obtained raw film stock on credit, and also a camera—as well as a cameraman, Leon Shamroy, who was looking for a break on a feature-length film. He then wrote a script that allowed him to juggle the various resources available to him, with a double standing in for Georgia Hale for anything other than full-face shots, and yet obtain a coherent story and, within three months, *The Last Moment* was completed.

The next problem was distribution. Once again, Fejos's own account should be treated with some caution, but he apparently managed to persuade two prominent reviewers of the time, Welford Beaton of the *Film Spectator* and Tamar Lane of *Film Mercury,* to attend a private preview and both immediately went out and wrote glowing articles on the film. (Fejos calls Beaton one of the toughest critics of the day, but a glance at some copies of *Film Spectator* shows that he was the kind of reviewer who tends to discover the greatest movie ever made—virtually his very words on *The Last Moment*—roughly once a month.) Then, in an account suspiciously similar to the method by which Von Sternberg managed to draw attention to *The Salvation Hunters,* Fejos relates that Beaton arranged for Chaplin to view the film at his own house, and Chaplin's praise led to United Artists agreeing to release the film.

At any rate, *The Last Moment,* which is now unfortunately classed as a "lost" film, opened to great critical praise on March 12, 1928, and Fejos found himself acclaimed as a genius. Contemporary accounts of the film make it sound like a fascinating anticipation—forty years before the fact—of the style of Alain Resnais and in particular of *Je t'aime, je t'aime,* and one can only hope that, as with so many other vanished works, a copy will eventually surface and allow us to check if this is indeed the case. The *National Board of Review Magazine* for February 1928 described it as follows:

THE LAST MOMENT ▶

The film is, briefly the history of events in a person's life at the moment of that person's death. It has thus a psychological import, although we have scant evidence at best of what a man can think about while he dies. But the theory is familiar to everyone, and it is an interesting theory which in this case has been used in a way to provoke the imagination and in a medium peculiarly suited to its artistic expression. In any event, the only subtitle in the film is the one at the beginning that sets forth this psychological assumption, and it is the only one that is necessary.

The first scene shows bubbles rising from the pond as a man's head vanishes beneath the water. Then follow, with lightning-like rapidity, flashes—faces, objects, snatches of scenes—an apparently disconnected phantasmagoria of life. These slow down to connected rhythmic sequences of action which compose the experienced incidents and situations out of which arose these mind images of the drowning man. These again, at the end of the picture, speed back into the lightning flashes of the brain. Thus, at the beginning and ending, the mechanism of the mind is plausibly and vividly exposed, the effect being that of peering into the secrets of cerebral action, while throughout the intervening stretches of the film the sense is preserved of a dream interlude, not quite real, but real enough, like reflections in a dark strange mirror before which a human life passes at its illuminating and crucial moments.

Nothing quite like this film has been done before. The significance lies in the fact that its method is the chiefly interesting and compelling thing about it. The story it tells is hazy, sketchy, nothing in itself extraordinary. But the method allows the medium to hold sway in a technical virtuosity. This manipulation of pattern and image, light and shadow, in a constant shifting and convolution, is of itself enough to cast a thralling spell. The pictures alone count—or rather the *moving* pictures. In short, it is cinema on its own, distinct, like painting, poetry, music. The medium is permitted to achieve its own results.

Here we see a motion picture cut free of its established mould and striving for a purer form. We see that the acting, which, even interpreted as stylization, could for the most part be improved, is not after all of prime importance, the idea being, not to represent characters, but to present them as a part of the mood, movement and intention of the film.

They are but images used like objects to hold the sequences together. Perhaps they may be likened to pervading notes in a harmony, something that threads the production like a theme. Again the relationship of music and cinema is suggested, not as mediums that go hand in hand, as supplements or complements, but as distinct, independent ways of awakening emotions and evoking imagination. So too with the story. It is simply an outline that gives the pictures cohesiveness. One technical feature is extraordinary. The film may be said to have been cut in the camera box. There is little splicing together of scenes. Continuity is photographed not assembled, separate shots dissolve one into the other. This gives an unusual flow to the composition. One can only assume that a very perfect continuity was worked out and closely followed by director and cameraman.

The Last Moment is another milestone at which our hopes for the motion picture can be replenished and our enthusiasm renewed.[3]

With the success of *The Last Moment,* Fejos was immediately contacted by all the major studios, but his insistence on retaining control of script, casting, and editing of any future project frightened most of them away again. Finally (after rejecting Carl Laemmle's first suggestion that he do a "clean sexy" picture for him) he signed for Universal, on

Two stills from THE LAST MOMENT

his own terms, but found all the scripts that the studio had on hand utterly worthless. At length he came across a three-page outline of a story that appealed to him, chose for his leads an unknown actress called Barbara Kent and the currently very popular Glenn Tryon, and made *Lonesome*.

Lonesome too was a huge critical success and firmly established Fejos's reputation as one of the top directors of the day (at the end of 1928 a new critical magazine called *Close-Up* drew attention to its intellectual respectability by announcing that it was read by Ernst Lubitsch, F.W. Murnau, Paul Leni, Henry King, and Paul Fejos). It remains one of the masterpieces of the silent cinema, a prodigious display of technical virtuosity that enhances rather than destroying its simple and moving story, and also one of the few Hollywood movies to present ordinary working-class characters without condescension, coyness, or falseness of any kind.

Originally conceived as a silent, *Lonesome* was one of many films in 1928–29 to have last-minute surgery performed on it in an attempt to make it acceptable to an audience increasingly curious about sound.[4] In this case, a music and effects track was added, as well as three short dialogue scenes that seem to have been filmed some time after the rest of the film was completed, if the significantly different lighting in them is any indication. Although the sound effects (car horns, squealing tires, whistles, shouts, dance bands) in fact enhance the film greatly, particularly in the crowd scenes, while the music, with its tuneful melodies and regularly recurring themes is very much in harmony with both the simplicity of the mood and the complex patterns of narrative repetition and contrast, the dialogue scenes produce a jarring and discordant effect. None of the scenes is strictly necessary to the story (and the silent version does very well without them),[5] the dialogue of the first two of them is banal in the extreme, and they are spoken by actors who are still ill at ease with sound and deliver their lines in a stilted and artificial manner. Apart from this, they are, of necessity, filmed from an entirely static viewpoint (the third scene, in a police station, contains one immobile shot at least two minutes long) and thus contrast sharply with the fluid, energetic pace and style of the rest of the film.[6]

The film opens with shots of New York, a fast tracking view of the city taken from a subway train emerging into daylight, superimposed images of faces, bodies, cars, buildings, a cacophony of voices, police whistles, and automobiles on the soundtrack. There is a cut to a ringing alarm clock and then a tracking shot away from Mary as she lies in bed. She gets up and starts to get dressed, the camera moving round the room with her; there is a dissolve and she is dressed and ready to leave. A cut takes us to Jim, whose alarm has failed to go off and who is thus in danger of being late for work. Fast bustling music on the sound track accompanies him as he rushes to get dressed, makes a half-hearted attempt at washing and doing his exercises and, viewed from an overhead shot, searches for his tie, which he finally discovers suspended from the chandelier.

A pattern is thus immediately established in which the two central characters, spatially isolated and still unknown to each other, are caught up in the same time-based routine of anonymous, isolated city existence. Marshall Deutelbaum has followed this and similar patterns through as they appear in the remainder of the film,[7] and there is no need to do more than hint at them here. Mary and Jim eat breakfast, at different paces, in the same restaurant; go to work on the same subway; spend the day in different areas of the same factory; meet friends after work and turn down offers to be the only unaccompanied figure on weekend outings; return home and fidget restlessly around their rooms till each hears a minstrel band passing the window to advertise a funfair. They end up on the same bus heading for the fairground and first become aware of each other there; further separations occur, however, before they finally meet again on the beach and begin to talk to each other.

The remainder of the film follows them through the evening at the funfair, taking part in the sideshows, dancing to the strains of "Always," and then driven apart again during a crowded roller-coaster ride and the chaos that follows when the wheel of Mary's car catches fire. After a long search, they fail to find each other, even though they are often in the same locations at exactly the same time, but separated by, in one case, a merry-go-round and, in another, the mere width of a pil-

lar. A rainstorm drives them away from the fairground and each returns disconsolately home believing that their relationship is over (each knows only the other's first name). Jim puts on a record of "Always" in his room to console himself, while, in her room, Mary is driven frantic by the strains of "Always" intruding from next door. They discover, of course, that they have been neighbors all along, kept apart by the anonymity of city existence (and also, presumably, by Jim's inability to get up on time in the morning).

If the story itself it simple, its presentation on the screen is enormously complex, though the complexity is everywhere directed towards creating a sense of the confusion and stress of urban life, while the scenes of Jim and Mary together have a straightforward directness that, combined with Barbara Kent's affecting performance (Tryon's, especially in the dialogue scenes, is rather too brash and grimacing), refute the charge sometimes made that Fejos was more interested in technique than in his characters. In the early scenes on the subway, for example, an acute sense of physical discomfort and nastiness is created as Jim fights his way into a crowded carriage where the effect of sweating, smelly bodies is almost tangible—and is intensified by the grotesque joke of a small man munching a large and obviously highly flavored piece of fish.

In the factory sequence, Fejos employs a barrage of highly sophisticated effects to produce a sense of the stress and monotony of a machine-dominated environment, while, at the same time, he maintains the parallel continuity between the events of Jim's day and those of Mary's. Within the constant framework of a clock remorselessly ticking away the hours of their incarceration, the camera begins on a shot of Mary at her job of telephone operator, then pans to the left, simultaneously dissolving into a shot of Jim at work that continues to become a long track along the workbenches; the camera then moves back to the right, dissolving in the middle of what appears to be one continuous movement to return to Mary at the switchboard. As Mary answers phone calls, the screen around her begins to fill up with small, superimposed images of faces of men and women talking on the phone, shouting, yelling, complaining, a yammer and babel of voices that steadily rises in intensity; the faces rapidly appear and vanish, piling up on top of each other until, at the climax of this scene, there are at least half a dozen different layers of superimposition together on the screen. From this the camera pans left again, dissolving once more to reveal Jim punching out an endless series of razor blades, then back once more to the chaos surrounding Mary, till finally the pointer on the clock reaches the hour of their release.

When the couple arrive at the fairground, Fejos again packs the screen with layers of action and detail. Individual faces and actions are superimposed on general shots of the swarming crowds, and the visual density of these scenes is intensified by a use of confetti, streamers, ticker tape and balloons worthy of Von Sternberg at his most exotic. The constant movement of the characters, combined with the motion of the camera, creates the sense of an anonymous, surging mass, in which both Jim and Mary find themselves trapped:this climaxes in a shot in which Jim, hurrying after Mary, is tripped by a small boy and falls to the ground; the camera continues smoothly on its way, leaving him behind, and he is immediately swallowed up in the indifferent crowd. In the fairground scenes that take place in the evening, after Jim and Mary have met and have begun to fall in love, a more positive effect is created by keeping the couple in the foreground of the action, though once again crowds swarm constantly around them, superimpositions and dissolves are freely employed, and the screen is full of the actions of throwing, sliding, riding, and tumbling as they take part in the various sideshows. In the original prints, sections of these scenes were hand-tinted, so that the yellow glow of

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lamps and the multi-coloured hues of balloons add yet another texture to the already almost saturated screen.

A dance hall sequence follows, starting with an overall purple tint and then fading to black and white; the words and music of "Always" appear on the screen as the couple dance together (causing a certain effect of redundancy in the sound version where the music can already be heard); the image itself begins to rock and sway on the screen in time to the music; and then the surroundings fade away, leaving them literally in a dream world of their own, dancing on the clouds with a yellow half-moon beneath them. The alternation between visual complexity and visual simplicity is characteristic of the film and allows Fejos to give full weight to the personalities of the two young people and to the uniqueness, as well as the typicality, of their experience.

This is accentuated by a subtle use of objects throughout the film. After Jim has tried, and failed, to make an impression on Mary soon after their arrival at the fairground, he stops to weigh himself on a machine and receives a card that says he will soon meet the one he loves; as he raises his eyes to look in the mirror before him, Mary's face comes into view behind him, smiling at him; when he turns round, she has disappeared, but he is encouraged to continue his pursuit of her. Towards the end of the film, when he believes that he has lost her forever, he finds the card in his pocket and tearfully rips it up. In the course of the evening, Jim wins a doll at one of the sideshows and gives it to Mary; she keeps it with her throughout the evening and when she too returns alone to her apartment, she clutches the rain-soaked doll in her arms, the drops running down its cheeks like tears. It has lost a leg on its journey and, in her room, the other leg too comes off; when she is reunited with Jim, she picks up the doll and it forms part of their embrace, the last shot of the film showing the couple in close-up from behind, with the doll's face visible between them. Other details are picked out elsewhere in the film to fill out the background of the characters' lives or to provide ironic contrasts with the action: Jim's room is decorated with pin-ups of pretty girls and a banner proclaiming the attractions of Honolulu, mute reminders of his drab and lonely existence; near the end of the film, when he leaves the fairground alone, a neon sign

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reading "Honeymoon Trail" can be seen in the background of the shot. *Lonesome's* visual complexity makes it one of the most fascinating of silent films to look at, with new and previously unnoticed details coming to the foreground on each viewing, but it is much more than a mere exercise in style, and Fejos's interest in simple, unsophisticated people struggling against a social environment that is, at best, indifferent and, at worst, actively hostile, continues into the finest of his later films.

Successful though *Lonesome* was, it remained the only film Fejos was to make in Hollywood with anything like full creative freedom. Catapulted within two years from the $5000 budget of *The Last Moment* to the $5 million of *Broadway,* he found that his ability to make films on his own terms shrank in almost exactly inverse proportion to their costs. He made two films for Universal in 1929: *Eric the Great* (also called *The Last Performance*), which was released both in silent and part-talking versions, and *Broadway,* a musical based on a recent stage success, starring Glenn

Tryon once again, and, rather weirdly, released as a silent as well as in a full sound version. Fejos himself claimed that *Eric the Great* had little interest for him except for the opportunity it gave to work with Conrad Veidt, but *Broadway* gave him an excuse for large-scale technical innovation, as well as allowing him to experiment with color in the final reel, filmed in two-process Technicolor.[8]

Eric the Great opens with a bravura display of technique that also reveals Fejos's interest in the backstage activities of theatrical production—an interest that was to find further expression in *Broadway* and the later, Danish-made, *The Golden Smile.* A quick series of dissolves brings us inside the theatre where Eric, a magician and hypnotist, is about to perform on stage; multiple images of the legs of chorus girls and the faces of spectators flash across the screen; another series of rapid dissolves shows the preparations for raising the curtain, and Eric himself appears on stage, the lighting throwing his shadow, hugely enlarged, on the backcloth.[9] In the course of his act, Eric demonstrates his hypnotic control of his assistant, Julie, and also his power over the audience, in a series of short cuts on his eyes and the faces of the audience, and then swirling images of the city, with Eric's face looming in superimposition over it all. After the performance, he leaves the theater with Julie, the camera accompanying them down in the elevator and then tracking smoothly along the corridor and out into the street.

Once the highly melodramatic plot gets under way, however, with Eric competing for Julie's affections against a young, newly employed assistant, and his senior helper, the jealous and vindictive Buffo, further complicating the situation, Fejos seems to lose interest and contents himself with creating a few striking scenes and images. Masks are used to good effect in conjunction with both Eric's and Buffo's faces to suggest their distorted emotions and the pretense of friendship both make towards Mark and Julie; when Eric discovers the young couple together, his huge shadow is seen dominating and dwarfing them, then shrinking rapidly as he walks away from them and suddenly reappears, life-size, beside them. A scene in which Eric prepares to announce his engagement to a roomful of guests involves an extended track in towards his face from one end to another of a crowded table and then, his plans thwarted, a faster track back over the table as the indifferent guests continue to eat and drink nevertheless. A trial scene, in which Mark is wrongly accused of murdering Buffo, is presented entirely without titles, Fejos recapitulating the evidence through rapid superimposed flashbacks of earlier scenes, and a shot of a spectator drawing a picture of the judge and a gallows indicating the inevitable verdict.

Eric the Great, in fact, is interesting mostly as an example of how efficiently and succinctly silent film language could be employed to create, entirely by means of images, relatively complex emotions and relationships and to carry through an intricate and potentially very confusing narrative.[10] As usual, Fejos avoided titles as far as possible (*The Last Moment* apparently had only one, and *Lonesome,* especially in its first half, used far fewer than was normal at this period). Lighting, shadows, close-ups, superimpositions, flashbacks, camera movements, all contain, and convey, codes that guide the spectator smoothly through the story though, unlike *Lonesome,* the codes of this film are essentially narrative ones and carry few reverberations beyond this.

Fejos apparently spent a good deal of his time on his next project, *Broadway,* trying desperately to spend the huge budget that had been assigned to the film. A good deal of this went towards the construction of a spectacularly elaborate nightclub set that, as Fejos ruefully admitted, made nonsense of the basic premise of the film: " . . . in this horrible abortion, this dreadful big nightclub, the Paradise Club, Glenn Tryon, who played a small hoofer, was constantly dreaming about 'big time.' He was in a nightclub which was bigger than anything that was ever built, and he was there dreaming of the big time."[11] This also makes the triumphant announcement that concludes the film —the news that Roy and his partner have been booked to play in Chambersville and Pottsburg—appear even more ironic and absurd than the script intended.

Another interesting anomaly in the film is that it completely changes its nature according to whether one views the sound or the silent version. The sound version is clearly a musical, with a gangster subplot; the silent is a gangster film with rather

incongruous interludes of noiseless singing and dancing. Fejos compensated for this by shooting the big musical set-pieces in such a way that they are fragmented into relatively short sequences and frequently interspersed by cut-aways to audience reaction and to the build-up of the gangster plot while the numbers are being performed. In the sound version, then, the emphasis is on the size and spectacle of the musical elements, rather than on the details of Glenn Tryon's rather inept singing and dancing; while in the silent version, these can be seen merely as a background against which the narrative of the film is worked out.

Not only does Fejos make extremely flexible and extensive use of camera movements for what was still a relatively early sound film, he is also obviously concerned with avoiding the static, one-dimensional filming of dialogue that bedevilled almost all the early talkies. Although many of the conversations are filmed in immobile, straight-on fashion,[12] Fejos often attempts to create two layers of interest in the sound or to have sound and image work in counterpoint instead of simple repetition. In an early conversation between Roy and the night club manager, for example, a degree of complexity is created by having a girl make a telephone call in the background, forcing us to alternate our interest between the two conversation. On some occasions dialogue continues off-screen while the camera cuts to the reaction of the listeners; characters sometimes walk into frame with their conversation already begun; and, especially in a scene near the end when a woman threatens to murder her faithless lover, the exuberant, carefree music of the stage show often provides a counterpoint to the dramatic action on screen. Though these seem elementary enough devices now, they were, of course, rarely enough produced in films made at the beginning of 1929.

The chief importance of *Broadway,* however, resides in the manner in which Fejos restored to the camera something of the freedom associated with his silent films of the previous year. The problems of editing recorded dialogue forced him to abandon one of his favorite techniques, that of superimposition, which survives only in the opening sequence of Broadway at night, with its multiple images of streets, nightclubs, neon signs and dancers, and a superimposed Devil looming ominously, and somewhat inexplicably, over it all. The camera then cranes up and over the huge set, before tracking through the corridors backstage with the manager. Most of the musical sequences begin with an overhead shot of the whole scene, tracking slowly in and down to medium long-shot for the dancing of the chorus and medium close-up for the singing of Roy and his partner. In those close shots where accurate synchronization of songs and lip movements is important, the camera is, of necessity, kept static; but, in general, Fejos's combination of music and dancing with extensive and elaborate swooping movements of the camera is quite extraordinary for the period. At the end of these set-pieces, the camera usually moves up and out from the characters again, restoring the overall viewpoint from which it began. (Throughout his career, Fejos displayed a marked predilection for symmetry and balance, in his use of camera movements and settings as well as in narrative structure.)

Often too, during these scenes, the camera will indulge in sweeping pans of the audience, moving both sideways and up and down to pick out details of the drunken celebrations at the various tables and in the boxes. In the last reel, filmed in Technicolor,[13] a shot of this kind is performed with dizzying speed, as the camera rushes rapidly round the faces with almost whip-pan effect. And, as a final example, there is the rather gratuitous, but nevertheless spectacular, shot that begins with the cleaning women clearing up after their night's work, cranes back and upwards to longshot, proceeds to a 360° pan of the deserted stage setting, moves back down towards the cleaners again, then tracks away from them to prepare the way for the entry of the main characters. If Fejos had been allowed to continue working in Hollywood with even a modicum of creative freedom, he would certainly now be ranked with Lubitsch and Mamoulian as one of the major innovators of the early sound period.

Even with *Broadway,* however, Fejos was fretting under the restrictions that Universal had begun to impose on him. He accepted another assignment, *Captain of the Guard,* but injured himself at an early stage of shooting by falling off a scaffolding and, no doubt gratefully, allowed the film to be completed by John Stuart Robertson. He had great hopes of being given *All Quiet on the Western*

Front to direct (having, by his own account, persuaded Universal to buy the rights to the book),[14] but this went to Lewis Milestone instead and Fejos was asked to make *King of Jazz*, a tribute to the musician Paul Whiteman. Though Fejos talks in quite some detail about his work on this film in the interviews he gave to John Dodds, critics seem unanimous in assigning it, as it now stands, to the direction of John Murray Anderson; in any case, Fejos was by now thoroughly disaffected with Universal and decided to break his contract with them, suffering some months of blacklisting as a result.

He then signed with Metro and became involved in another of the fascinating, but little studied, aspects of early sound cinema when he was assigned to direct the German- and French-language versions of the prison film, *The Big House*, the English version being directed by George Hill. Some critics, most notably Philippe Haudiquet, claim that Fejos's French and, especially, German versions are markedly superior to Hill's "original"; but it is difficult to see how such a judgment can be made on the basis of anything other than the acting. Given the problems involved in making shot-by-shot comparisons of prints that exist in archives several thousand miles apart, it seems clear from looking at the English and German versions that the camera set-ups remained identical throughout and, presumably, the casts of the four different language versions (there was a Spanish one too) were paraded through in sequence before moving on to the next set-up. For reasons of economy, the large-scale scenes in the prison courtyard, the dining hall, and during the riot were employed indiscriminately in all four versions, with the result that one can occasionally glimpse Wallace Beery in long-shots of the German version, where his role was elsewhere played by Heinrich George.

By now Fejos had had enough of Hollywood altogether and, early in 1931, he decided abruptly to return to Europe. As he himself put it: "I simply didn't fit into the Hollywood picture. I found Hollywood phony, not just the people but the city itself; it's a reclaimed desert and artificial. I found everything artificial. I found the people impossible; I mean, for example, the people in the story departments; writers, so-called writers, utterly unintelligent, utterly uneducated, stupid hacks who sat down in afternoons in an office for story conferences and tried to build a drama."[15] He went first of all to France, where he filmed a version of *Fantomas*, then back to Hungary, where he made two extremely fine but politically controversial works, then to Austria and then on to Denmark. By 1935 he was tired of struggling both with producers and with scripts that did not totally engage his interest; he persuaded a Danish film company and Svensk Filmindustri to allow him to set off for Madagascar to film, at his own discretion, material for a series of short ethnographic films. From then until 1941 he worked in Madagascar, Indonesia, New Guinea, Siam (where he made the feature-length *A Handful of Rice*, returning to his favorite theme of the young couple struggling against an adverse environment) and, finally, Peru, completing a large number of anthropological films that still retain a good deal of interest. In 1941 he retired from film-making altogether to take up the post of head of the newly established Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and spent the time until his death in 1963 in mainly academic pursuits. Of his later, still shamefully neglected, work in fiction films, *Marie* (also called *Spring Shower*), made in Hungary in 1932, and *Sonnenstrahl*, filmed in Austria in 1933, belong, at the very least, in a class with *Lonesome*.

NOTES

1. *Broadway* was released on May 27, 1929; *The Love Parade* on November 19, 1929; and *Applause* on January 4, 1930.
2. Information on Fejos's career is taken from: John W. Dodds, *The Several Lives of Paul Fejos* (The Wenner-Gren Foundation, New York, 1973), and Philippe Haudiquet, *Paul Fejos (Anthologie du Cinéma*, Paris, No. 40, December 1968). Dodds's book is based on interviews with Fejos now lodged in the Columbia Oral History Research Center.
3. Quoted from: George G. Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness* (University of Rochester, 1966), Vol. II, p. 426.
4. Such films came to be called "goat-gland talkies," no doubt because goat glands are sometimes thought to have aphrodisiac and rejuvenating properties.
5. I am indebted to Marshall Deutelbaum of George Eastman House for confirmation of this point. The film was, of course, publicly released in both versions.
6. "Silent" versions of the film can also be seen that are merely the sound version without a sound track: i.e., the dialogue scenes are retained, but with no spoken dialogue and no intertitles, thus creating a very confusing impression.
7. "The Structure of the Studio Picture", *Monogram* 4 (1972), pp. 33-37.

8. One wonders, incidentally, just what audiences in the late twenties made of the many films they saw that were liable to burst into sound and/or color at 20-minute intervals before relapsing into silence and/or black and white, and also what aesthetic considerations were at work when directors knew that some audiences would see the film as a silent while others would see exactly the same images with dialogue and music. Fejos's work of this period seems to have been created in accordance with silent film techniques first of all, presumably because the film remained totally comprehensible in this way to all who saw it, whereas a sequence that relied for its impact on a sound effect would have no meaning at all for the many people who saw the film as a silent. Thus, at the end of *Lonesome*, the superimposed shots of Mary's face with the record of "Always" spinning "inside her head" and the song itself on the sound track may seem over-determined to a modern audience, but the superimposition was necessary to get the point across to audiences who would not have the song to guide them. These questions, together with others concerning the exact form in which contemporary audiences saw and heard many important films of 1928–31 (and even later) are worthy of further investigation.

9. This opening sequence is very reminiscent of that of Paul Leni's *The Last Warning*, which was also released in 1929.

10. It is interesting to compare the narrative strategies of this film with those of contemporary works like *The Last Warning* and Benjamin Christensen's *Seven Footprints of Satan* (1929), where equally elaborate and complex plots, based mostly on deception, are to be found. Leni and Christensen both provide resolutions that "explain" the overall series of events, but leave a good many of the individual details without any explanation at all and just as incredible and "impossible" at the end of the film as they were when they first occurred. The assumption presumably is that, whereas readers of a detective story can go back and check out the logic of the explanation step by step, viewers of a film are in no position to do this and will be contented with a few minutes of plausible mumbo-jumbo at the conclusion to tie up the most glaring of the loose ends. *The Big Sleep* is a later, and obvious, example of the same pattern.

11. *The Several Lives of Paul Fejos*, p. 42.

12. The normal procedure when cutting in titles for the silent version of such scenes seems to have been to show each character at the beginning and end of his speech, with the words appearing on screen in the middle; any camera virtuosity, even if feasible, would therefore have been lost for audiences of the silent version and there would be no point in attempting it. The fact that he was shooting for both versions also forced Fejos to resort at times to silent film techniques of representing sound that seem unnecessary in the sound version: the approach of an intruder to a private conversation, for example, is shown by a close-up of his feet and then a shot of a door handle.

13. It is difficult to judge the quality of the Technicolor from the solitary print in which it appears to survive today. Greens and reds, of course, predominate, but now in a rather muddy and muted fashion, whereas the effect in its original form was more likely to have been brash and garish.

14. *The Several Lives of Paul Fejos*, p. 44.

15. *The Several Lives of Paul Fejos*, p. 48.

Reviews

DAYS OF HEAVEN

Script and direction: Terrence Malick. Photography: Nestor Almendros and Haskell Wexler. Music: Ennio Morricone.

Troops of nomads swept over the country at harvest time: reckless young fellows, handsome, profane, licentious, given to drink, powerful but inconstant workmen, quarrelsome and difficult to manage at all times. They came in the season when work was plenty and wages high, and were very independent of bearing. They dressed well, in their own peculiar fashion, and made much of their freedom to come and go.

They told of the city, and sinister and poisonous jungles all cities seemed in their stories. They were scarred with battles. They came from the faraway and unknown, and passed on to the north, mysterious, leaving the people of Sun Prairie quite as ignorant of their real names and characters as upon the first day of their coming.

—*Hamlin Garland*, Boy Life on the Prairie (1899)

History repeats itself with persistence. When, in 1941, Orson Welles made the most important American film of the decade, *Citizen Kane*, many critics wrote that it was "too beautiful" visually, "too confused" as a narrative, and "too cold" in its impact. Almost the same criticisms are now being directed at Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*. Everybody is fascinated by its visual (as well as auditory) qualities, yet many find its characters "unconvincing both as people and as symbols" (Joy Gould Boyum), "its drama deficient, and its psychology obscure" (Andrew Sarris); others claim that "most of the film's events take place abruptly, lacking adequate preparation or a dramatic payoff" (Arthur Knight); while some discard it completely as an "overwrought artifact" (Pauline Kael) or "a test case of pretension" (David Thomason) and "one of the most perversely undramatic, uninvolving and senseless movies ever made" (David Denby).

The most surprising—and symptomatic—complaint of the critics is that *Days of Heaven*, what-

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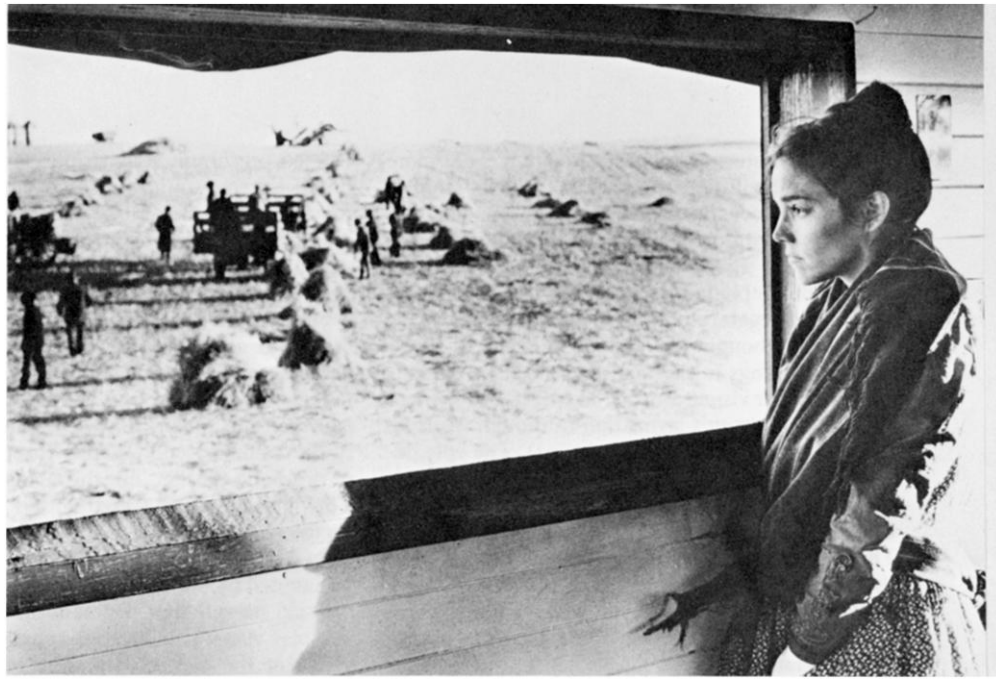
ever its cinematic qualities, lacks "drama." Imagine someone criticizing a theater piece because it has drama but "lacks" cinema! As a maker of cinema, Malick subordinates the kinds of dramatic conflicts which might make for good theater, and the kind of narrative line which might make for powerful literature. But Malick's film does not deny the power and impact of the filmed events. Through his directorial method, he conveys the relationships among his characters, reveals their psychologies, depicts the atmosphere of their natural environment and the singular social circumstances in which they live. We must admit that Malick does all this through attention to specifically *cinematic* values, creating a unique composition of image and sound. This film's artistic ambition is high, and its achievement as a work of art in the medium of film places it on an aesthetic level few films even aspire to.

I am not claiming that *Days of Heaven* is a faultless film. I question the clash between its insistence on a documentary depiction of the natural environment and its casting of actors, some of whom are nonprofessionals chosen for their authentic "types," and some of whom are "stars" who do not fit in. Also, in my judgment, certain aspects of the film's construction could be improved. A film of epic proportions calls for a longer and more elaborate development, I believe. Yet, *Days of Heaven* is such an extraordinarily impressive and well-thought-out piece of cinema that any lover of the art of film must gladly forgive its shortcomings. In these times, when we are inundated by films that would not lose much if we only read their scripts (which are usually poorly written anyway) or watched the actors delivering their lines on stage (lines which likewise are rarely well read), we ought to be grateful for a real piece of cinema of high quality.

The narrative line of *Days of Heaven* is very simple and straightforward. In 1916, a group of migrant workers, leaving the industrial area near Chicago, arrive in the Texas panhandle hoping to find jobs harvesting wheat. The plot involves four characters: the young worker, Bill (Richard Gere); his girlfriend, Abby (Brooke Adams); his Little Sister (Linda Manz, a 16-year-old college girl); and the wealthy farmer, Chuck (Sam Shepard, the well-known dramatist). The episodes are narrated by Little Sister who talks with child-like candidness, unpretentious irony, and spontaneous humor. The conflict begins when Bill and Abby, posing as brother and sister, agree to a marriage between Abby and Chuck, believing that the wealthy farmer will soon die of a terminal illness. Chuck gradually becomes suspicious of the situation, and when he finds out he has been decieved, he confronts Bill, and in the ensuing fight, the farmer is killed. After this climactic moment, Bill, Abby, and Little Sister escape from the farm, hiding themselves in the forest. Following a dynamic chase, Bill finally meets his own death while attempting to cross the river. Abby takes Bill's sister to a boarding school, but she runs away from it with another girl who "does not know what to do and where to go."

The visual beauty of this film—however stunning and grandiose—is not a goal in itself. The pictorial composition of virtually every shot is fully integrated with the filmed event. For example, the emphasis on the lyrical beauty of the vast Texas landscape, as shown in the very beginning of the film, fits the excitement and expections of the migratory workers passing through the wooden archway built in the wheat fields. The chromatic expressivity of Nestor Almendros's (and Haskell Wexler's) cinematography is enhanced by the continuous camera movement. In nearly all shots of the harvest the camera glides, giving the viewer a palpable sense of the rhythm and space in which the action occurs. This is not to say that the camera never stands still: when necessary, as in the tap-dancing scene or in numerous intimate conversations between the protagonists, the camera assumes a single characteristic position, intently "staring" at the events or persons. Yet, visual movement prevails on the screen: its overall dynamism matches the nature of the subject filmed, which is essentially *movement,* that is the constant motion of people, machines, animals, and natural forces. The cinematic dynamism in *Days of Heaven,* intensified by the stereophonic sound, creates the highest degree of kinesthetic impact. Some of the sequences (the wedding party, collective work on the farm, the final manhunt) courageously take the risk of combining the shaky hand-held camera with the most technically sophisticated execution of tracking, panning, and craning shots. In gen-



DAYS OF HEAVEN *by Terrence Malick*

eral, Malick's shooting style successfully fuses the best features of Hollywood technology with the new, expressive modes of European and avant-garde film-making.

There is much that can be said about every sequence and almost every single shot of this film. For the moment, I want to concentrate on the breathtaking shot of the train moving over the high bridge construction, photographed against the transparently blue sky and garnished with a thin strip of black smoke. This shot has been criticized —as was Welles's shot of the fabulous Xanadu castle seen in the distance on the hill against the sunset—for being unrelated to the film's content, a "slick slideshot," typical of Malick's "arty" direction. Let us analyze this shot closely and relate it to the film's "content," showing how misguided is the contention that this image is "kitschy."

Among the last shots which precede this moment, are those which show (a) Bill running from the mill, after knocking down the manager, (b) a red-hot bar or pipe collapsing on the steelmill floor, and (c) Bill, Abby and Little Sister walking along the railway tracks toward the train in the distance. Then Malick cuts to the extremely long view of the train speeding over the bridge. The pictorial refinement of this shot makes it a typical mise-en-frame, i.e., a shot that captures the viewer's attention predominantly on a graphic-chromatic level. As such, this shot becomes a perceptual shock for the audience, marking the beginning of the next sequence and forming a *thematic* link with the previous sequence in which we see the three protagonists "hitting the road" by catching the train. Logically, the audience wants to know where Bill is heading after his physical assault on the boss. At first glance, it seems that the story will take a romantic-sentimental course, along the line of any number of picaresque movies depicting various adventures of the hero and his lover. However, the subsequent shots (with the poor people riding on the freight train) defeat such expectations. The visual beauty of the landscape through which the train passes continues to be captivating for us, the viewers, but not for the people on the train, including Bill, Abby, and Little Sister. Their expressions, their demeanor and their dress indicate that we are not going to see a love story, and that we *will* have to involve ourselves mentally in the film's development. Thus, from the very beginning, Malick invites the audience to participate in resolving certain problems posed in his film. His primary function is not to entertain us, but rather to engage us in a polyphonic structure devoid of external suspense.

Malick's type of stylization can be related to the

great film masters of the past, though it is not mere mechanical imitation of other films. By its emphasis on deep focus (perspective), and low shooting angles, it is reminiscent of Welles (although Welles tends toward Expressionism); by its concern for the lyrical depiction of objects, buildings, machines and vegetation, Malick can be compared to Kubrick (although Kubrick depicts the environment and things in the modernist form). Malick's preference for visual contrast in exterior sequences is close to Murnau's stylization (although Murnau deals with black-and-white contrast). The epic development of the narrative in *Days of Heaven* is carried out with a true sense of space and time, the sense that chracterizes Dovzhenko's works. The notion of mass movement, social turmoil, and the concept of reconstruction of the past in *Days of Heaven* parallel Ford's best films. Malick's tendency to poeticize the objects and details of nature can be related to James Agee's concept of cinema. Also, Malick's inspiration draws from painting as well. The graphic and chromatic execution of the shots depicting spacious landscape can be seen as "homage" to Edward Hopper, while the concept of diffused light in interiors (created without the use of artificial light sources) is a cinematic transformation of the luminous atmosphere found on canvasses by Jan Vermeer. Malick showed similar concern for the film heritage and inspiration from painting in his first feature-length film, *Badlands,* but in *Days of Heaven* he fully succeeded in transforming each of these components, and integrating them into a personal cinematic style.

The motion picture images in *Days of Heaven* are, in their own way, a cinematic tribute to the twentieth-century photos of the American west. Yet, Malick's vision of history and geography is poetic rather than factual. I am sure that ornithologists will find that some of the bird sounds are not actual sounds of the birds shown on the screen; or, some zoologists will claim that not a single bison was in the wild at the end of 1916. These inaccuracies and anachronisms are, however, justified by the overall poetic vision of the entire period and the general atmosphere of the environment as depicted in the film.

The greatest kinesthetic impact which permits the audience to penetrate the characters' moods and conflicts stems from the dynamic interaction between the captivating composition of the shots (filmed on 70mm Panavision), and the most expressive stereo sound (Dolby System). The vibrant movement of color images projected on the huge screen, intermittently harmonized with and juxtaposed to the stereo sound, provides a new dimension for the disjointed narrative line. Thus, many aspects of the film's content—especially the environmental atmosphere, the mass psychology, the characters' intimate feelings and their subdued moods—are conveyed in a way that no words can express. This means that we do not experience the film's content predominantly through the dialogue or dramatic conflict, but through sight-and-sound. The interaction of stereo sound and Vistavision image penetrates the thematic connotation of the filmed events to the point that they cannot be comprehended by the conventions characteristic of traditional narrative or dramatic forms. In fact, the complex visual and auditory counterpoint compensates for the lack of dramatic tension conceived of in theatrical terms. The fractional structure of the narrative is emphasized by long fade-out/fade-in transitions between the sequences; they are consequently perceived like loosely related "pages" from a memoir. Malick obviously wants his audience to contemplate the previous sequence and to *think* of its meaning before the next event begins to unfold. This type of cinematic punctuation concurs with the disjointed and dispersed commentary narrated by Little Sister, whose sentences are casual and often incomplete.

The issue of narrative is the most perplexing aspect of modern cinema. Some film theorists argue that the plot in modern cinema must be radically subverted by surrealistic displacement of the logical order and spatial development of the story, primarily on the basis of the stream-of-consciousness technique (as Resnais did in *Last Year at Marienbad*). Then, there is a tendency to suppress or circumvent the plot and to maintain it at a "low-key," non-suspense level (as Antonioni did in *Eclipse*). Malick belongs with those directors who resist the dominance of the narrative in film by developing events which are linked associatively instead of dramatically. In doing so, he intentionally detaches the audience from the story and the characters' destinies, urging us to experience the film's real meaning *via* means that cannot be and are not supposed to be conveyed through the plot line. Not being able to identify ourselves with

the sketchy characters, we become concerned with the whole group of people and its position in the given historic conditions. This emotional detachment from the narrative and its protagonists is made possible by the use of the mosaic technique of building the film. The main purpose of this technique is to liberate the narrative structure from the romantic mode of story-telling, while, in turn, emphasizing its emotional relationship to the ambience. Malick needs this detachment because his main interest is to depict the movement of a specific group of people joined together for economic reasons. He draws his imagery of this movement from his personal experience when, as a poor teenager, he was a migrant worker, following the harvest from his native Texas north to Canada. In the film, however, he reverses the migration geographically: the seasonal workers move from Chicago to Texas, although the actual filming was done in Canada (Alberta).

Placed against a lyrically photographed landscape filled with blue sky, white clouds, and golden wheat, the existential problems of the seasonal workers assume a sardonic note through the development of the prosaic love triangle which ends in the death of the two male participants. The consistently gorgeous shot composition therefore functions as a counterbalance to the insipid action (plot) in which the protagonists are involved. The conflict among them and their fight to survive—both physically and psychologically—are so rudimentary that they are not even aware of its implications. Furthermore, they are so submerged in the tension created by the circumstances that they cannot see the beauty of the surroundings in which they exist. While we, as I mentioned, are enthralled by the landscape through which the train passes in the beginning of the film, the close-ups of the workers on the train are grim, introverted, brooding—obviously preoccupied with the uncertainty of whether they will find jobs in the South. However paradoxical it may seem, the three surviving protagonists become aware of nature's beauty only when they break with social structures: after killing the farmer, Bill, Abby, and Little Sister run away and for the first time enjoy boating on the river and living in the forest (Little Sister says that she has never before seen the beauty of nature). Metaphorically speaking, this implies that human beings can be happy only if liberated from the rigid restrictions of society and traditional institutions, even if this liberation is accomplished by violent means, and may be short-lived. This point is reiterated at the end of the film when Little Sister runs away from the boarding school without any idea where to go or what to do. As Malick suggested *in Badlands,* the price that his characters must pay for their breaking with established social order and morality is their own defeat: they accept it with childish self-delusion as if satisfied to be "happy" for at least a short period of time. But, they are not truly content in these "days of heaven" because they are nothing but glimpses of happiness that make their downfall even more hideous, since they know that they are doomed. Obviously, Malick is not preoccupied with the plot as the film's component which functions for itself; for him the story must work through a contrapuntal interaction with the other ingredients of the film. In fact, the first sign of dramatic conflict between the characters occurs after half an hour of the film's development, when Bill suggests that Abby accept Chuck's offer to stay on the farm after the harvest is over in order "to have a happier life." Until then, various sequences depict the workers' arrival at the farm, the atmosphere in the wheat fields, a religious sermon marking the beginning of the harvest, the functioning of the machines, harvesting, the reaction of the animals to the intrusion of machines into their territory, exploration of the landscapes, etc. Then, another thirty minutes of film time is dedicated to the atmospheric mood on the farm—the interval after Abby marries Chuck and before he realizes that she and Bill are not brother and sister as she had told him. The tension among the three protagonists progressively becomes more acute, while the actual conflict is built slowly by exchanging the sequences of the bare fields after the harvest, the carefree and somewhat boring life in the mansion, Bill and Abby's secret meeting at the brook under the moonlight, President Wilson's train passing near the farm, hunting, and the arrival of the "Flying Circus." Even when Chuck discovers that Bill and Abby have intimate relations, the confrontation between the two men is again delayed by Bill's decision to leave the farm with the "Flying Circus," which leads to another set of sequences depicting life on the farm in the winter time, the coming of the new spring, the second arrival of the seasonal workers, Bill's

return on the motorcycle, the plague of locusts and the fire in the field. These two catastrophes structurally prefigure the physical encounter between Chuck and Bill. After the disasters, the plot develops more quickly: the second fight between Bill and Chuck results in the farmer's death. Subsequently, Bill, Abby, and Little Sister run away from the farm, and wander along the river hiding themselves in the forest. The closing manhunt ends with Bill shot down while trying to cross the river. The brief epilogue deals with Little Sister: Abby takes her to a boarding school, but she escapes with her friend without any prospects.

The plot is designed as one of many elements in a broader epic structure which is linked, as I mentioned, by prolonged fade-out/fade-in transitions that emphasize the segmented composition of the narrative. The audience is kept in complete darkness to ponder for a while the previous scene, often to resolve it for themselves, and to be ready for another experience. Against this, the prolonged dissolves are used to condense events and to indicate passage of time, while at the same time creating visual symbols which comment upon events and objects. For example, the flock of flying birds merging with the branches of the trees serves as a poetic, visual *coda,* appearing on the screen just before the wedding ritual in the forest; the grand mansion seen doubled on the screen (one view of the building superimposed on another, filmed from a different distance and under modified lighting) gives the impression of a mysterious castle in the midst of nowhere.

Malick's narrative ellipses work in three ways: occasionally he omits part of the action, most often the ending, because the resolution is clearly implied by the situation and environment; sometimes he leaves it to the audience to resolve the sequence for themselves; but most often the intrinsic meaning of the sequence becomes vivid later when associated with subsequent events. Thus the secret meeting between Bill and Abby in the moonlight would lack its deeper meaning were it not situated at the brook where they drink champagne and play with each other running through the water. The brook near the farm is repeatedly shown as the site where the workers find pleasure and happiness: Bill and Abby revisit it to live out their childish fantasies. In this context the "arty" image of the wine glass, lying on the bottom of the brook with a fish lithely circling around it (as in a fancy aquarium), is an ironic underscoring of their fragile illusions about happiness. Similarly, the shot of the *nature morte,* (the close-up of the decorative carafe of wine with two crystal glasses placed on the antique table near the window) is inserted at the moment when Bill inspects the farmer's house after Chuck and Abby have left for their honeymoon. After their return, Chuck's growing suspicion of the situation and the resulting tension between the protagonists is momentarily relieved by the unexpected arrival of the "Flying Circus," which can be read as a symbolic relaxation since the three artists indeed come "from the sky." The comic exasperation of the Italian clowns breaks the anxiety on the farm and the tension is apparently resolved since Bill decides to leave with the Circus.

Bill's return to the farm renews the tension which had subsided during his absence. The anxiety is intensified even more by the concurrence of two natural disasters—the onslaught of locusts and the wheat fire. Malick repeats close-ups of the locusts devouring the wheat to signal—in a repulsive way —the forthcoming calamity: the magnified mandibles of these small insects become on the screen monstrous jaws, a threatening portent of the apocalyptic disaster soon to come. Certainly, the encounter between Chuck and Bill would look histrionic and psychologically unjustified without instigating the tension created by the wheat fire: irritated and anguished by the devastation of his land, Chuck manifests his physical suffering and his hatred of Bill.

As we see, Malick's script is composed as a poetic and elliptic film-log: most of the sequences only initiate the theme or conflict which will be developed and resolved later, indirectly adding to the subdued psychological interaction between the characters. We are encouraged to follow—and experience—the multi-faceted progression of time and its effects on human beings. In this context, it seems justified that some aspects of the characters (such as their past or the psychological motivation of their spontaneous actions) are left unexplained and unresolved. Some complain for not being allowed to identify with the "psychological depth" of the characters. But Malick intentionally presents his four protagonists without their past

and future: at one point Little Sister describes her fellow workers as having no particular destination in life, because "when you've done your work, that's it . . . they do not need you any more . . . they always know they can get someone else . . . " Unaccomplished, without hope and uncertain of tomorrow, these "mysterious people, ignorant of their real names" care only for their current existence. Consequently, the audience can witness only their immediate reactions to situations into which these outcasts are thrown and over which they have no control.

Hence, there is a tragic aura that constantly hovers above almost every gesture, expression and word of the characters. This tone is adequately echoed in the vocal modulation of the commentary which Little Sister delivers with nonchalant pace and with great colloquial grace. A similar mood is evoked by the nostalgic musical motif (composed by Ennio Morricone) repeated at the crucial points of great mass movements which assume parable proportions.

The stereo sound emphasizes the spatial aspect of the film image; it works both horizontally and perpendicularly: the audience receives information about the events occuring outside the frame which triggers its imagination constantly. Our visual perception is recurrently challenged by the complex sound track so that we often become aware of the depth of field on the screen by hearing sound which moves from the close foreground and disappears into the far background. This differentiation of the sound zones is paralleled by the frequent appearance of graphic foregrounds in the shot, as various objects pass in front of the moving camera. The cuts generally occur at the moment when objects enter the foreground, creating a blurred, almost abstract, pattern on the screen; in contrast to this, the subsequent image provides a clear view of another aspect of the same scene. This builds great kinesthetic dynamism as in the plague of the locust sequence and especially in the prairie fire. The apocalyptic meaning of these sequences is distinguished by the dynamic editing combined with constant camera movement and shot compositions which vary from the graphically depicted "locust rain" to the abstract images (mise-en-frame) formed by the tongues of flame quivering in the extreme foreground. The impact of these images is further intensified by the counterpoint between the camera movement and the wide scale of the projected image, deep-focus, often silhouetted composition of the shot, the veristic atmosphere of the scene and the imagist use of color.

The real "drama" in *Days of Heaven* emerges from the symbolic mismatching of the trifling love triangle and the complex socio-environmental setting. Mismatching is also foreshadowed by the documentary footage (including authentic photographs of the period and silent Chaplin slapsticks) and highly stylized pictures (there are moments when the farm house and the gazebo in the field look like surreal sculptures). But the final result is the unification of the authentic and symbolically stylized elements so delicately achieved that the sensitive audience accepts it as a cinematic revelation of the inner meaning of the events, objects, landscape, animals, and human beings depicted on the screen. Malick explores all the capabilities of modern film technology, as Kubrick did ten years earlier in his *2001: A Space Odyssey*, proving that the technological evolution of this medium need not "kill" its artistic capacity, but, on the contrary, can open up new opportunities for artistic expression.

It seems preposterous that some critics overlook the *cinematic* function of the visual beauty in *Days of Heaven*. They blame Malick for making each shot "more beautiful and exciting than the previous one," failing to understand that the visual beauty in this film serves as an element in a counterpoint that becomes ever more substantial. As the visual and auditory impressiveness increases from sequence to sequence and from shot to shot, the personal situation of the characters becomes more and more hopeless, as they are pushed toward their own tragic fate. Chuck dies lying on his field—devastated by locusts and fire—surrounded by his horses, which he sees for the last time through the smoke that blurs his view of the sun. Bill dies in the water, more precisely in the river: after he is shot down from behind, we see him in a medium shot, photographed from under the water, as he falls on the water's surface in slow motion, his face deformed with pain. As viewers, we instantly associate this shot with the shot of the lost wine glass lying on the bottom of the brook. Similarly, the final shot of Little Sister

walking with her friend away from the camera along the railroad tracks brings to mind one of the introductory shots in which we see her running with Bill and Abby over the railroad tracks in Chicago. The position of the camera distinguishes these otherwise similar shots: while the Chicago shot is photographed from a very low angle which emphasizes the distant horizon, in the latter a slightly high angle shortens the perspective into which the two girls wander aimlessly.

From a structural viewpoint, *Days of Heaven* is built as an "inverse symphony," in that it has a strong accent at the very beginning (montage in the mill), and ends with a subdued epilogue (the two girls leaving the boarding school). If we exclude the overture (which serves as the background for the credits), composed of authentic photographs from the period, the introduction is conceived as a brisk cinematic movement. Then follow many sequences of various dynamic intensities, among them machines reaping the wheat, the harvesting celebration, the locust invasion, the field fire, and the death of the farmer. The end seems toned down and quiet: after the long travelling shots of Bill, Abby, and Little Sister on the boat and walking through the forest, comes the stationary shot of Bill's dead body floating on the water. The epilogue is conceived as a conclusion which reinforces the open structure of the film and provides the final ideological statement: we see Little Sister and her friend disappearing in the distance without knowing where they are going. Using T.S. Eliot's vocabulary, one would say that *Days of Heaven* begins with a "bang" and ends with a "whimper."

Segmentation of the film's structure would show how Malick built *Days of Heaven* on a musical principle. I discerned 65 clearly differentiated segments conceived in variable rhythmic beats, each relating to the filmed event. For the purpose of this review it will suffice to indicate only the most noticeable rhythmic blocks which provide the overall flow of the film. As has been said, after the overture (with the documentary photographs) comes the first sequence, which is cinematically compact and bristling; then follow fifteen sequences executed with the camera movement in relatively slow rhythm. Next three extremely dynamic sequences showing workers and machines in the field create a visual "allegro" on the screen; another set of five "adagio" sequences depicting the atmosphere on the farm is broken by the montage of the workers' entertainment (dancing, swimming, playing games); a dozen sequences executed in the "andante" tempo occur before the second arrival of the seasonal workers. The tempo of these sequences is achieved by a "vivace" combination of montage and hand-held camera movement. Another dozen atmospheric sequences precede the plague of the locusts and the wheat fire, which are the two most dynamic montage peaks designed as pure "presto con fuoco." After the farmer's death, the tempo of the gliding camera over the river and through the forest is emphasized by "moderato" elegance which intensifies the lyrical movement broken by the forceful chase at the end that leads to a "lento" finale. It is difficult to find a recent American film which relies so strongly on the musical-rhythmic structure of its sequences and their interaction. For his great care for structure, Malick deserves special acclaim.

In both *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* Malick's directorial style is at the same time realistic and metaphorical. Realistic because it preserves the documentary nature of the film image on the spatio-figural and auditory level; metaphorical, because it uses the specific filmic devices to raise the photographed events and objects to the aesthetic as well as ideological levels. As I explained, the lonely mansion erected in the wheat fields is perceived on the screen on the one hand as the authentic mid-Victorian clapboard house and on the other as a metaphor of power, alienation and comfort, symbolizing the social contradictions in which the human conflicts are located. Similarly, the introductory montage sequence in the steel mill stands as the opening rhythmic accent, justified by the protagonist's physical outburst which anticipates the climax of the entire film and whose full meaning will become clear later. The locust invasion and the wheat fire are, cinematically, movements that foreshadow the tragic resolution of the conflict among the three protagonists. Rhythmically, the dynamic montage intermixed with sequences composed of long-takes and slow movement within the shot, forms the musical structure of the film, which has an open ending, like an unfinished ballad. We leave the theater recalling the images with great sensory-motor reverberation, as if we have heard a symphony whose sounds remain

long with us. Hence the film lingers in our mind after first viewing, and the longer we think about it, the stronger is our desire to see it again. Then the real values of *Days of Heaven* come through: we appreciate it as a saga of American working-class life at the outset of the century. The elliptical progression of the narrative line becomes justified, because Malick uses it to counterpoint the plot with the mood, atmosphere, psychic tension and poetical accents emerging from the auditory-visual movements that saturate every single shot. We realize a more profound dimension of the film: it is not only a "treat" for eyes and ears, as many critics stated; it is more than that, since its inner structure stimulates us to think about what we see and experience on the screen. What remains in our memory are not only beautiful shots, but a "Gestalt" feeling of space and time, atmosphere and mood, which characterizes all great films.

Those who complain that *Days of Heaven* "suffers from the deficiencies of drama and its obscurities as psychology," either want to impose obsolete expectations and demands on a film which denies traditional narrative conventions, or are insensitive to the values of true cinematic poetry, or perhaps both. With his second full-feature film Malick proves that he possesses vital cinematic consciousness: in a sense, he continues the tradition of D.W. Griffith, who gave us great cinematic epics of American history, although the narratives of his films—if judged in isolation—could be most trivial.

Days of Heaven will be studied by those who care about film as an art form, and will come to be recognized as a classic of the American cinema. Unfortunately, like many other films of artistic significance, this film has not yet attracted a large audience. The trade reports say that it is not "doing well" commercially in spite of many rave reviews. However, all those who want to support real creative tendencies in cinema ought to approve Malick's decision to withstand Hollywood's temptation to push its directors into commericalism, even if he must wait another five years to realize his third film. This is small compensation to an artist who does not want to make aesthetic compromises. At the same time, we must recognize the paradox that Hollywood *did* produce *Days of Heaven*. The only acknowledgment of such an unexpected gesture may come from those who prefer film as art to film as entertainment. It will also encourage Malick to persist in his ideals about cinema as a means of artistic expression.

—VLADA PETRIC

Brooke Adams and Richard Gere: DAYS OF HEAVEN.

THE AMERICAN FRIEND

Director: Wim Wenders. Script by Wenders, based on the novel "Ripley's Game" by Patricia Highsmith. Photography: Robby Müller. Music: Jürgen Knieper.

Karen Jaehne's essay "The American Fiend" in *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1978) and Michael Covino's piece "Wim Wenders: A Worldwide Homesickness" in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1977-78) have both perceptively treated *The American Friend*—the former in the context of the attack on American imperialism it shares with Werner Herzog's *Stroszek* and the latter in the context of its place in Wenders's canon. Yet neither has done justice to the film's highly developed self-reflexiveness—particularly its evocation of *film noir* and its extensive casting of film-makers—that distinguishes it from the rest of Wenders's movies and that suggests a comparison with Fassbinder's *American Soldier*. Both films parody the *film noir* genre while simultaneously exposing the corrupt American values it has exported to Germany; yet *American Soldier* is an early minor work in Fassbinder's canon while Wenders's *American Friend* is a major achievement, for this self-reflexive level is richly interwoven into the many other thematic threads that create the film's complex texture.

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Karen Jaehne's essay "The American Fiend" in *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1978) and Michael Covino's piece "Wim Wenders: A Worldwide Homesickness" in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1977-78) have both perceptively treated *The American Friend*—the former in the context of the attack on American imperialism it shares with Werner Herzog's *Stroszek* and the latter in the context of its place in Wenders's canon. Yet neither has done justice to the film's highly developed self-reflexiveness—particularly its evocation of *film noir* and its extensive casting of film-makers—that distinguishes it from the rest of Wenders's movies and that suggests a comparison with Fassbinder's *American Soldier*. Both films parody the *film noir* genre while simultaneously exposing the corrupt American values it has exported to Germany; yet *American Soldier* is an early minor work in Fassbinder's canon while Wenders's *American Friend* is a major achievement, for this self-reflexive level is richly interwoven into the many other thematic threads that create the film's complex texture.

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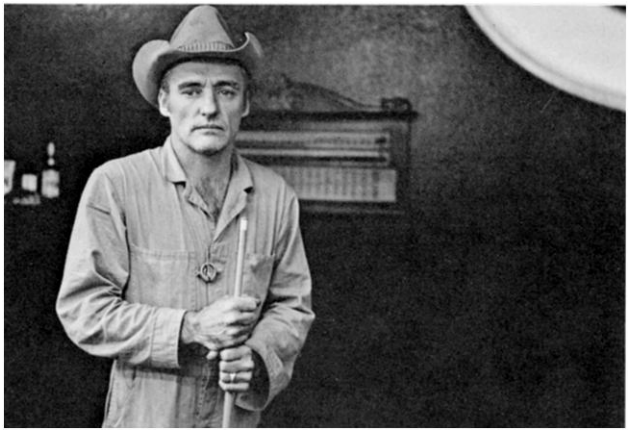
American Friend opens in the Soho district of New York with Dennis Hopper as Ripley, a hustler who deals in fake paintings, going to visit Nicholas Ray, playing an artist who imitates dead masters. The ironies are immediately set in motion by the casting. Nicholas Ray is, in fact, one of the authentic masters of *film noir* whole film style is being imitated by Wenders. Though probably best known in Europe for his performance as a likeable dope dealer in the buddy road movie *Easy Rider,* Dennis Hopper is one of the few American filmmakers who has tried doing personal films; his brilliant *Last Movie* shares many similarities with *American Friend* (its portrayal of American artistic imperialism, its complex self-reflexiveness, its use of Sam Fuller) and destroyed his bankability in Hollywood. The persona that Hopper has created as an actor in all of his film is precisely what Wenders is attacking; yet as a director, Hopper is the nearest equivalent to Wenders that our country has to offer. Nevertheless, the Americans in Wenders's film represent the film industry and the values celebrated in Hollywood movies—violence, money, shrewdness, and fast-paced action. They don't have much of an eye for color (the real *film noir* movie were black and white; Wenders makes a bold use of color); they are not interested in old-world craft (Wenders chooses a Swiss craftsman as his protagonist). But the Americans do know how to make money. That requires being in the right place at the right time, and being totally in tune with the present moment. Ripley hops jets back and forth across the Atlantic and feels at home in any European city, for they are all becoming increasingly like New York. Believe it or not, Ripley claims to be bringing the Beatles back to Hamburg; their lyrics and those of other pop tunes provide the banal dialogue for some of the key dramatic moments in the action. He may not be a poet like Dylan or an activist like Lennon, but he's a Pied Piper promoter, who exploits the power of art to impose his own values on other cultures. He's a hip manipulator with a lot of style, like so many other American heroes in gangster movies and westerns.



◀ *Dennis Hopper*

The symbolic power of Dennis Hopper's presence far transcends *film noir,* for with his cowboy hat, nasal drawl, and wild recklessness, he also evokes the Western and its roots in earlier American literature of the frontier and the South. As he talks to himself in his white colonial mansion on the Elbe, he celebrates another powerful river (undoubtedly the Mississippi) and spouts the kind of adolescent, romantic nonsense that many Americans find so irresistible. This American Friend turns out to be another Tom Sawyer, who is trying to lure a Swiss Huck Finn into elaborate schemes involving murder, money, and unnecessary risks, and into a buddy relationship that replaces the family and undermines his relationship with his wife Marianne (Lisa Kreuzer). As Ripley tapes and listens to his own existential babblings (these pretentious remarks also comment on his role in Wenders's film: "I'm so confused," "I know less and less who I am") and snaps his own bleary-eyed image on a polaroid, Hopper reflects the kind of alienated mechanized narcissism that our rugged individualism has become. With his sensitivity, self-indulgence, and high cheekbones, Hopper captures the precise mixture of irresponsible evil and boyish charm that makes this archetype so dangerously appealing.

Ripley's primary victim is Jonathan Zimmermann (Bruno Ganz), a Swiss frame-maker and art restorer who lives in Hamburg with his wife and child. His profession not only allows him to be framed, as is prototypical of the *film noir* hero, but also to express his preoccupation with the *mise en scène,* color, and composition that have traditionally concerned German film-makers. Although he restricts himself to painting, Jonathan has several toys that trace the history of cinema as it developed the ability to create the illusion of motion out of still pictures—the zoetrope that his boy and his friend play with, the illuminated three-dimensional sign in the boy's bedroom, and the

novelty gifts that Jonathan and Ripley exchange in establishing their friendship. With a painterly eye for color and an instinctive contempt for exploitation, Jonathan has a moral and aesthetic superiority that immediately attracts and annoys Ripley. Like a Claggart stalking a Billy Budd, Ripley waits to discover Jonathan's weakness (a fatal blood disease) and then draws him into a trap —bringing him business that will initiate their friendship, and stirring his fears of death with a fake telegram that will make him accept an offer to commit a murder, insuring the destruction of his moral and aesthetic purity. Ripley's favorite maxim is FDR's bromide: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," which becomes his foreign policy in this adventure abroad. Interestingly, like Jonathan, at this moment Wenders, Fassbinder, and Herzog are all involved in deals making movies in cooperation with American friends. Undoubtedly, on one level, the film is about the complex interaction between the American and German film industries as postwar cultural allies.

This level is most apparent in the art auction scene, which brings the main characters together and establishes the motives for the plot. While Marianne observes and records the actions, Jonathan spots the phoniness of the painting that Ripley is offering for sale, arousing his admiration and anxiety. When they are introduced, Jonathan refuses to shake his hand, which sparks in Ripley a desire for revenge. Later, when he overhears a conversation about Jonathan's illness, Ripley begins to design his plot. The auction also reveals the intricate corruption of the art world on an international scale (the filmic equivalent would probably be an international film festival). Ripley has come to Hamburg to sell a fake painting, supposedly by a European but actually done by an American, to European collectors or dealers; he employs an elegant shill in the audience to keep the bidding as high as possible. It is actually bought by an American dealer, who doesn't really care whether it's authentic because he knows he can get a higher price in Texas, particularly since he has bought it in Europe. While most of the actual players in this game are American, they use Europe as their playground. In this negotiation, buyers and sellers, artists and audience are all equally corrupt. The only purist is Jonathan, and that's precisely why he has been selected as the victim both in Ripley's plot and in Wenders's.

In their plots to corrupt Jonathan, both Ripley and Wenders use a French go-between played by Gerard Blain (who had a role in Truffaut's first dramatic film *Les Mistons* and in Chabrol's *Les Cousins*); he draws Jonathan into two absurd assassinations where it is impossible to determine identities or motives. Historically, Blain's role reminds us that it was the French new wave that first celebrated *film noir* in their criticism and in their absurdist existential versions—e.g., Chabrol's many "films noirs in color"; Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player,* which he claimed was an homage to Nicholas Ray and Samuel Fuller; and Godard's *Breathless,* which launched the French genre by paying tribute to Bogart and casting Jean Seberg as the deadly American girlfriend; *Made in U.S.A.,* which was dedicated to Ray and Fuller; and *Pierrot le Fou,* which like Wenders's *American Friend* also includes Fuller as an actor, a surviving heroine named Marianne, and final images of a fiery explosion and a desolate beach. These directors—particularly Godard—provided the most immediate models for Fassbinder and Wenders. While committing his first murder in the Metro, Jonathan accidentally bumps his forehead, which echoes a similar slapstick bump in the head in the opening of *Shoot the Piano Player.* (*American Soldier* ends with a comical murder in the subway, but in that version the Americanized German hero is the victim; later in *Fox and His Friends,* Fassbinder redoes the scene with painful irony.) In the next scene, Jonathan stops in a French bar where he is given a band-aid by Jean Eustache, the brilliant unbankable director of *The Mother and the Whore,* who represents another wave of independent film-making with a personal style that is very French. Significantly, this café is the only environment in the film that is typically French. While in Paris, Jonathan is practically always indoors; yet he is confined to architectural spaces that are highly futuristic and Americanized: the Metro stations with their electric blue escalators and their multiple television monitors that record the murder without helping to catch the killer; the American hospital with its advanced technology and fake diagnosis and the commodious luxury hotel with its familiar decor that makes Ameri-

cans feel at home anywhere in the world, plus carpets that give electric shocks. The Paris skyline looks amazingly like Manhattan—especially with a fake Statue of Liberty. The only sign that links the French capital with nearby Germany is the expressionistic red sky.

The second assassination sequence is masterful in absorbing the three film traditions—American, German, and French—and using them as a basis for Wenders's highly original style. We see overhead shots of a modern streamlined train racing across a coldly beautiful German landscape; momentarily we get outside the story and are distracted from the murder as we become engaged in comparing and savoring the natural and mechanical forms of beauty. We almost hate to get back inside, but once there the slapstick violence grows more extreme and the impossibility of following the plot or recognizing the characters more absurd. Perhaps we recognize Samuel Fuller as the main gangster, but he is identified as the head of a pornography ring rather than as a master of *film noir,* and this self-reflexive game removes us even further from the inner story. At some point in this sequence, perhaps as Ripley and Jonathan are flinging dead bodies off the train, we stop caring about the plot and start enjoying the farcical black humor. This reaction is functional because while it detaches us from the plot, it simultaneously enables us to identify with the changes that Jonathan is undergoing that will ultimately lead to his insanity. Once he accepts the existential fact (fictional in the short run, but ultimately true) that his death is immanent, he chooses to murder a stranger in order to insure the financial security of his family. Yet this act undermines all of his values and cuts him off from his wife and child; like the hero of Sartre's story *The Wall,* he is now capable of experiencing only the absurdity of his situation. During the second assassination on the train, Jonathan is ready for anything and so are we—even for the sudden appearance of Ripley, who becomes his murder buddy without apparent motive, perhaps simply for the fun of it.

◀ *Center: Sam Fuller*

Once on this train of action, there is no going back to the original story or tone. When Jonathan and Ripley kill the rest of the gangsters, pushing Fuller down the stairs (perhaps parodying Richard Widmark's famous murder of the old lady in *Kiss of Death*), they encounter a character who is totally bandaged and who engages in a life and death struggle with Blain. This phantom killer is never identified; we merely accept the absurdity because he seems to belong in the gangster's vehicle—an ambulance—and because he reminds us of a similar figure in Joseph Heller's black comedy *Catch 22.* As they plan to dispose of the corpses and ambulance, which requires Jonathan to drive Ripley's T-Bird, Marianne comes looking for her husband and reminds us of the original story and its more conventional expectations. At this moment of potential suspense and emotion, she waits for Jonathan to speak, curious and anxious as to what he feels and what he will do. In a flat nasal voice, he sings, "Baby, you can drive my car." We have to laugh, although we know his doom is sealed. As Marianne drives him to the ocean, following Ripley in the ambulance, we once again are distracted by the beauty of the natural landscape—the clouds and sky reflected in the water on the flat, desolate beach—even though we know we're headed for the climax and the final twist of the tortuous plot. Similarly, Ripley can't resist driving the ambulance in circles on the sand, spontaneously playing like a child, although he has come on deadly earnest business. After Ripley sets the ambulance on fire and enjoys the blaze, Jonathan abandons him on the beach. We almost feel sorry for Ripley, who indulges in self-pity, unable to understand why he's been betrayed by his buddy. Oblivious to his terrified wife beside him and to the beautiful setting, Jonathan drives off in his Volkswagen like a maniac until he slumps over dead, of accelerated natural causes.

The American Friend is one of the most brilliant parodies I have ever seen because it uses the

parodic elements to explore the deeper implications of the genre. It demonstrates what *film noir* can be at its best, while simultaneously exposing the destructiveness of its limitations. It braces the historical development of the genre while insuring a significant place for itself both inside and outside the tradition. It succeeds in arousing and balancing contradictory responses in its audience—a witty comic detachment with its self-reflexive and ironic tone, excitement and suspense with its complicated thriller plot, emotional sympathy with its strange cast of characters, and aesthetic wonder with its extraordinary painterly visuals.

—MARSHA KINDER

THE WRONG MOVEMENT

Wim Wenders's estimation of contemporary West German society permeates *Wrong Movement,* Written by Peter Handke, the wandering journey of Wilhelm through his country relates to *Wilhelm Meister* more as contradiction than parallel. In 1795 Goethe's Germany was experienced as an artist's inspiration. A hundred and eighty years later, the young artist finds only creative suppression.

The updated Wilhelm (Rudiger Vogler who played Philip in *Alice in the Cities* and Bruno in *Kings of the Road*) is not so much a writer as a young man who wants to be a writer. His inadequacies are quite as self-derived as they are imposed by a restrictive society. Wilhelm's solution to his moral and esthetic quandary cannot be Herzog's. In fact, Wenders explicitly rejects Germany's disposition to avoid fear through athletic fortitude. In the mouth of a middle-aged financier host to Wilhelm and his party, a figure used to voice some of Germany's insights about her cultural morass, Wenders and Handke propose that courage should really be rejected because it constitutes a strategy for avoiding the origins of fear. The attitude is somewhat sententiously expressed by Ivan Desny whose heavy French accent has the effect of foregrounding the sentiments, like the Italianate French of Giorgio Albertazzi in *Last Year at Marienbad.*

Rüdiger Vogler and Hanna Schygulla: WRONG MOVEMENT

Wilhelm is dispatched by his mother with a train ticket to Bonn. En route, he carries on a succession of glance-avoiding exchanges with a sensuous young girl in his car, and with her older male companion. Across the station platform he longingly views a blonde woman whose train veers off to some other apparent destination. Each time, Wilhelm withdraws from the challenge and appeal of the unknown. He is an adventurer who shies from adventure.

Throughout this sequence, Wenders brilliantly enjoins Wilhelm's avoidance maneuvers both by an authorial point-of-view (parallel to her departing train, we follow the blonde in a traveling shot that is independent of Wilhelm's window seat vantage) and by tongue-in-cheek toyings with picaresque tradition. The figures in the train refuse to be ignored, require that Wilhelm accept them, even that he finance their journey.

The man is a one-time Nazi concentration camp administrator, now playing the harmonica to accompany his young charge, Mignon, who juggles oranges and tennis balls. Played by Nastassja Kinski, she remains mute throughout the film, perhaps because there is never any overcoming reason to speak. In Bonn, the blonde, Therese, played by Hanna Schygulla, inexplicably attaches herself to their group, attracted to Wilhelm and bored at casting herself as an actress into other peoples' dialogues. One more character temporarily accompanies the entourage, a young, heavy-jowled poet who rather resembles an innocent Don Seymour, Capt. Reynard in *To Have and Have Not.* The poet embodies a distorted reflection of Wilhelm at his most decadent and fatuous. He writes dreadful verse that extolls alienation and self-loathing.

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Each major character parodies a figure in *Wilhelm Meister.* Mignon, for example, was drawn by Goethe as a lyric, free spirit: dancing, versifying, singing and playing a cither. Wilhelm's tedious reflections on art's Epiphanies now become complaints about the incapacities of fiction, theater, and poetry either to sustain or to reflect a modern sensibility. The occasional ponderousness of such monologues is quite intentional on the part of Peter Handke, who wrote a very different prose to supply the basis for *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick.*

Visiting the industrialist by chance, the group spends an evening of conversation. Last to retire, Wilhelm seeks out Therese but comes instead upon the adolescent Mignon, naked, beautiful, and waiting for him. In response, Wilhelm slaps her face.

The following morning, each figure recounts his nighttime dreams, and the party embarks on one of Goethe's *Wanderjahre* excursions. Their walk ends overlooking what appears, significantly, to be a recently constructed reservoir. This sequence is a marvel of figure groupings, accomplished part by design, in part surely fortuitously. Conversations veer from subject to subject, from level to level as different pairings transpire. Discovering the Nazi's past, Wilhelm's sense of oppression mounts.

Through the countryside hike, *Wrong Movement* struck this writer as one of the most stunning, engrossing films he has ever witnessed. Henceforth, strands of character and event seem to unravel like loosely bound twine. It almost appears that Wenders's need to confront separate value constellations one with another, each embodied in a different character, can neither integrate nor resolve story, mood, and overall intention.

The host kills himself; the group quickly departs, avoiding involvement as they have shunned violence and emotion in previous incidents. During a short stopover, the poet wanders off. The others take up residence in Therese's ugly, unfinished, faceless, modern apartment. Wilhelm quarrels with Therese, for he cannot bring himself to consummate their relationship (he pleads involvement with his writing), and she cannot tolerate his coldness. Wilhelm tries to kill the old Nazi, finally to sever his tie to Germany's history, but he cannot consummate this act either. The old man departs, and Wilhelm sets off on more "adventures," at picture's end parodically associated with Wenders himself. Wilhelm is persuaded to document a pair of travellers with their 8mm camera.

It is not the talky dialogues which undercut *Wrong Movement,* however often they bemoan the impossibility of melding today's political needs to dreams, to poetry. Perhaps the very crisis of German culture, the energy which nurtured so many astonishing film accomplishments during the seventies, simultaneously develops a quicksand on the ground where narratives must lay out their foundations. In Herzog, the unbridgeable gulf between dream and reality can only find its resolution in impulsive, manic thrusts. Rejecting any such solution, Wenders condemns his protagonists to a succession of brilliant, wrong moves.

—JOHN L. FELL

WORD IS OUT and GAY U.S.A.

Historically the cinematic image of the homosexual, which has only come into focus within the last decade, has consistently suffered from stereotypical distortion, derision, and condescension. As minority members who have never been in control of their public image, gays have witnessed in narrative fiction film an almost systematic attempt to devalue, while giving token recognition to, their lives and feelings. If television responds on occasion with a sympathetic episode, movies are largely content with liberal notions of obvious "fairies" for humorous relief, or worse, unhappy psychopathic villains, reinforcing ignorance and prejudice among what Christopher Isherwood terms "the heterosexual dictatorship."

In the field of documentary or *cinéma-vérité,* where the index of reality is somewhat more reliable, and where we at least have the advantage of experiencing not actors impersonating gay types, but the real thing, isolated examples failed to have any significant impact. In *The Queen,* Frank Si-

Gay USA is distributed in 35mm and 16mm by Kit Parker Films, Carmel, California; and *Word Is Out* by New Yorker Films in New York City.

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mon penetrates behind the facade of male drags participating in a beauty contest, while at another extreme, Rosa van Praunheim's *The Homosexual is Not Perverse but the Society which Produces Him* offers a cynical, candid glimpse into the S&M/motorcycle/leather faction of the macho gay world; and Shirley Clarke's feature-length interview with a black male prostitute, *A Portrait of Jason,* conveys an unsparing, albeit unpleasant confessional vision.

Diverse and positive images of gay persons were not forthcoming for two basic reasons. In spite of the clarion call of "Out of the Closets" by liberationists, large segments of the gay populace feared any sort of public exposure that might mean loss of jobs, friends and/or family support. Simply getting an openly gay woman or man to appear before a camera was a primary difficulty. And secondly, the difficulties in financing a nonsensational (noncommercial) treatment of the subject was virtually insurmountable.

The first work reflecting the otherwise extremely vocal politics of Gay Liberation was a highly professional student production, *Some of Your Best Friends* by Ken Robinson of the University of Southern California. Employing a *cinéma-vérité* format, Robinson captured the spirited genesis of the movement in New York and Los Angeles, interviewing up-front participants about feelings and experiences of oppression and freedom. Especially memorable is a Los Angeles man walking through Griffith Park, relating how he was entrapped by a local vice officer and his plans to defend himself in a court trial (which he subsequently won). A gay contingent is seen confronting a psychiatric convention, challenging its oppressive advocacy of aversion therapy with a rousing debate. Representatives of a New York homophile organization are shrouded in shadow to protect their identity while the bright, shining faces of the street folk project pride, prominently including women as well as men.

Six years were to pass, however, before other gay film-makers were to significantly take up the direct-cinema approach begun by Robinson. Though financial support was still virtually nonexistent for pro-gay films, the rising tide of anti-gay propaganda, spearheaded by Anita Bryant's Bible-thumping crusade, provoked social consciousness and a revitalization of a movement throughout the land. A highly sophisticated quality gay news medium began to unite divergent forces into political cohesiveness and at the same time the awareness of a need to communicate prompted socially conscious film-makers to action. Their efforts resulted in two unique and exceptional human documents, *Gay USA* and *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives.* Both films employ the interview as a fundamental technique but their production circumstances and organization of material differ distinctly in spite of occasional parallels.

In 1975, Peter Adair, then a producer for San Francisco's KQED, had become dissatisfied with the quality of his work there. "I felt that I needed to make films that were of value to me . . . I wanted to get into some sort of social film-making. I started with the issue that concerned me most—that was rights for gay people." He envisioned a short film to be used as a teaching aid for college and professional groups, made of interviews with diverse individuals. In spite of two years of perseverence, Adair discovered foundations were unresponsive to such a project and finally resorted, like the makers of *Gay USA,* to private and individual investors. He joined forces with his sister Nancy, assistant cameraman Andrew Brown, sound editor Veronica Selver, New York film-maker Lucy Massie Phenix, and Rob Epstein, and the Mariposa Film Group came into existence. With the expansion of the group came the decision to enlarge the scope of the work. What had begun as a modest presentation of positive role models for gay people became a much larger sampling of the vast range of America's gay population.

Every attempt was made to engage film-makers and participants in a collective expression, decentralizing all procedures from shooting to editing. In preparation, the members "pre-interviewed" 200 persons from varied sections of the country on videotape. The team then collectively viewed this material and selected 26 women and men whom they returned to film. As Teresa Kennett notes in *The Reel Thing,* certain ground rules were agreed on by the Mariposa Group. "The setting for every interview was worked out very carefully between subject and film-maker. Choice of location and 'props'—photographs, pets, clothing, etc.—was made on the basis not only of what looked good

visually, but of what was meaningful to the interviewee. Making the subject feel at ease was of utmost importance; to this end a stationary camera setup was decided upon, thus eliminating any extra distraction. And since whoever operated the camera also conducted the interview (usually with only one other person on sound) it was possible to develop real unbroken communication between interviewer and interviewee." In addition to the interview material, several hours of *vérité* footage were filmed, depicting working and living situations of the subjects, and songs performed by Trish Nugent and the gay rock band Buena Vista.

Four of the Mariposa Group spent over a year editing various cuts down from approximately 50 hours of material. From time to time cuts were screened for predominantly gay audiences, with responses solicited in questionnaire form. Thus, the larger community was able to participate in determining the actual final content of the film. In this process it soon became evident that the large amount of cutaway material detracted from rather than amplified the succession of interviews, and in the final 135-minute version, its presence is minimal. And this undoubtedly accounts for the strength of the film's emotional and psychological impact, as well as for its structural and conceptual weaknesses.

◀ Word is Out

Word is Out is divided into three broad sections; "The Early Years," "Growing Up," and "From Now On." The rather vague nature of these arbitrary categories becomes evident as each section unravels, prefaced by an introductory montage of the personalities included in each segment. Although the interviewees have been carefully chosen to display a richly diverse and contrasting series of views and lifestyles, no apparent structural pattern emerges in the editing scheme. Individual interviews are broken up and reappear from time to time, often being used in more than one section, as remarks seem generally relevant to the broad category.

The static stationary camera angle is consistently a frontal medium-close to close shot, giving the impression of a talking portrait in which the subject directly addresses the camera/audience, creating an intimate, engrossing and often emotionally charged rapport between subject and viewer. However, in a film of a two-hour-plus duration, variety and contrast are essential to retain the viewer's interest, regardless of how riveting the interview material is assumed to be. In the final analysis, though each individual shot has its own mood, composition, and dynamic center, it is an isolated unit that only marginally relates to the other units that make up the framework.

In addition to the gay musicians, who are seen at random intervals in studio and in concert performances, three sequences deviate significantly from the armchair-interview format, giving a much-needed variation in the cinematic space. Elsa Gidlow, 79, the eldest member of the cast, is seen talking with three young women in her Northern California home about lesbian politics and her feelings about appearing in the film. Suddenly, for the first time we see the faces of interviewer(s) and interviewee in the same space, engaged in a conversational exchange, while the hand-held

camera freely moves from face to face. Similarly, after we have become familiar with a blond lesbian named Whitey, who lives in a Northern California cabin, we see an early morning excursion in which she and her friends saw off a section of a giant tree that is threatening her domicile. The operation, shot from a variety of angles, is successful and audiences invariably cheer and applaud this rustic interlude. Following interviews separately and together with lesbian mothers Pam Jackson and Rusty Millington, we see a beautifully filmed sequence in which the two women play touch football with Rusty's children on a beach and serve a picnic supper, during which one of the children is interviewed. Other cutaway material, such as the film's self-proclaimed drag queen, Tede Mathews, frolicking with children at a playground, or the middle-aged couple Harry Hay and John Burnside picking berries together in the countryside, displays a charm that is more poignant than their speech.

In spite of its diversity of ethnic and sexual types, it would be a mistake to draw anything other than superficial sociological arguments from *Word is Out,* which is only a bare suggestion of the variety of gay lifestyles. Brooklyn professor Betty Powell, one of the film's most articulate speakers, emphasizes, for instance, that she should not be taken as in any sense representative of black lesbian feminists (though she is in fact the only one to appear in the film).

Nevertheless, certain patterns begin to emerge in the selection of material that assert a strongly middle-class value structure. The large number of stable couples suggests an ideal of traditional matrimonial bliss. Only one character speaks up for the single, casual-sex status that characterizes vast numbers of gay people. Although only one speaker, a vice-president of a New York corporation, defines himself as a conservative ("I feel that radicals are necessary and I feel that we are necessary") the majority of persons interviewed can be categorized as politically conservative, especially those whose formative years preceded the sixties and Gay Liberation. Comedienne Pat Bond, a middle-aged ex-WAC who talks of communal, role-defined lesbian life in postwar years and recounts the terrors of the Army's inquisition during the McCarthy period (which resulted in 500 dishonorable discharges) is nevertheless nostalgic about the past. Although she sees the necessity of gays coming out publicly now and finding a new sense of identity, she misses the butch/femme role dichotomy and the secrecy of "the Little Orphan Annie decoding society" in her early years.

WORD IS OUT

The film's final section, "From Now On," tends to focus on the more radical dimension of gay politics and its most eloquent and persuasive arguments are presented by lesbian feminists Betty Powell and Sally Gearhart. Powell, who is a member of the National Gay Task Force, tells of coming out of a heterosexual marriage and realizing her love for a woman through the women's movement. Her assertion that "lesbians and gay men have a great deal to offer in terms of restructuring the world culture," is more fully articulated by Sally Gearhart, who asserts that all humans are born with a bisexual potential, but from the moment they are born they are made half-persons by society's strict programming of appropriate gender behavior and attitudes. Gays tend, on the other hand, more toward a natural balance of male and female in one person. This is, of course, an ideal and the film's inclusion of stereotypical dykes such as Pat Bond (who quaintly classifies herself as "femme") and effeminate men like Roger Harkenrider (who honestly admits to archetypal "faggoty" behavior) suggests the infinite complexity of sexual role-playing in the gay world. On the other hand, there are typically male models present in Donald Hackett, a black truck driver, and female models in Linda Marco, a pretty, former "American dream daughter," both of whom came out from heterosexual marriages (another significant pattern in the cast). It is also interesting to note that while

the film's most cogent intellectual arguments come from women, its strongest emotional moments emerge from men. Probably the most memorable is George Mendenhall's tearful reminiscence of a male opera singer named José encouraging men in a gay bar to sing "God Save Us Nellie Queens" in the fifties when San Francisco police mercilessly harrassed gays. More deeply touching is the confession of young David Gillon: "In high school I thought I was just one of those people who could never love anybody. When I fell in love with Henry, it meant I had incredibly deep emotions—it meant I was human."

Like *Word is Out, Gay USA* is also a collective production, made by a large number of persons under the banner of Artists United for Gay Rights, and a considerable part of the work is made up of interview footage. But the point of view and structure are radically different.

Rather than being assembled by democratic communal decisions over a five-year period, *Gay USA* was filmed largely on one day: June 26, 1977, and apart from actual materials it was created with donated talent and labor from a vast number of individuals, all coordinated by one film-maker who conceived the project and gave it its final creative form: Arthur Bressan, Jr.

In the angry wake of the defeat for gay rights in Miami on June 7, Bressan, who had begun to establish his gifts as a director in the gay porno circuits, joined in the San Francisco evening demonstration that grew spontaneously. "My movie camera jammed in front of City Hall. I stood there and felt the energy swirl around me. If this was 'defeat' what would Gay Freedom Day be like?" Bressan began to "cinematize" the approaching spectacle in his mind, and gradually the idea emerged of forming units of six cities (ultimately, San Francisco, San Diego, New York, Chicago, Houston, and Los Angeles) and using the parades as metaphors for an emerging gay consciousness in America.

The material which Bressan eventually received, though varying in quality, was largely overwhelming. The San Francisco parade, made up almost 250,000 participants from many parts of California and the US, was captured in its diverse splendor by eight camera crews at varying distances from the swirling tide of humanity, which sync interviews filmed against the constant flow of marchers and observers. However, by cutting from San Francisco to New York to Los Angeles to Chicago and back, the film gives the impression of a united, growing struggle against conformity, bigotry, and oppression from coast to coast. Before discussing the structure of *Gay USA,* however, it is important to assess the nature of the materials of which it is constructed.

In *Word is Out* one has the impression of distinct, unrelated, reflective, private experiences being expressed; in *Gay USA,* one is confronted with persons caught up in the communal excitement of the "politics of celebration," in which spontaneous feelings and attitudes are highly charged. Certainly, *Gay USA* is the first film ever to fully capture the intense anger, joy, and love embodied in these very public expressions of freedom. In addition to the sync interviews Bressan amplifies the 1977 material with historic footage of the first Christopher Street Parade in New York in 1970 and of subsequent parades in Los Angeles and San Francisco leading to the present; slides, still blow-ups, "found" footage of civil rights marches and Nazi parades are also interpolated in the film's elaborately edited finale.

Before making a total commitment to film, Bressan lectured on history, philosophy, and American civilization in New York, and his avowed primary cinematic models, Frank Capra and Sergei Eisenstein, reveal his strong personal political stance. His admiration of Capra's social criticism and the individual confronting the political establishment are tempered by a collective spectrum of values. "Politics is a dangerous game for a filmmaker," says Bressan. "It's double jeopardy when it's a low-budget film. You can't afford second thoughts. And political winds are always changing. I was lucky. I got solid political advice from people in the Bay Area—and long distance help from Houston, Chicago, New York, and Boston. The rest I trusted to good intent and the margin for error audiences allow when they're feeling kind." In *Gay USA* Bressan orchestrates a richly diverse spectrum of faces, opinions, and life styles: lesbian lovers, sympathetic straight families, drag queens, gay professionals, children and youths, gay women, ex-prisoners, dykes on bikes, blacks, school

teachers, Asiatics, anti-gay dissenters and critics of every social, economic, political, and religious persuasion.

From Eisenstein Bressan has evolved a system of montage that is composed of dialectical oppositions in both sound and image. The lengthy pre-title sequence begins with a series of black-and-white stills of the San Francisco March underscored by a series of voice-overs. A New Yorker: "I think it's at least double what it's been in the past. As we expected, there's a new militancy in the gay movement and it's here today." A black male: "I'm not prejudiced or anything like that, but when they come in the street and mess with normal people . . . " An elderly Jewish male: "I'm surprised to see so many women in the parade . . . there must be an awful lot we don't know about." A Puerto Rican male: "I have two beautiful children, both boys—7 and 9 years old. If they grow up to be gay I'll love them as much as I love them now." A deep-voiced Southern male: "I think they're *nuts*," followed by what sounds like a shrewish Brooklyn housewife, "We understand they have a problem. We want them to be cured, we don't want them to go on living in sin." A proponent for repealing laws against gays is juxtaposed with an anti-abortionist who supports Anita Bryant and flatly admits, "I'm not for gay rights." A young male gay Catholic: "The reason we're staying in the Church is to protest its policies against gay people," followed by a fundamentalist who claims, "Homosexuality is condemned by Christ in the Bible as an unnatural way of living." This negative pseudo-religious/scientific diatribe, which introduces the film's first actual synchronized interview, is counterbalanced visually with individual and collective images of happy, smiling faces united in a common struggle that belies the thrust of the opposition. Positive gestures and statements from gays and friendly non-gays give the work a spirited tone of debate that reveals much spontaneity and healthy thinking in this tribal gathering.

Image and sound continue to combine moments of frivolity and seriousness, one of the features of these large demonstrations which Bressan uses to great effect. A quip by a Florida gay about California orange juice is, for instance, set against a unisex figure covered in funeral black holding a

GAY U.S.A.

prominent cardboard sign: "I am the homosexual you are afraid to see." One is constantly aware of the mixture of humor, sometimes of a bizarre, extravagant nature, with a truly painful, sometimes tearful struggle in the face of a hostile environment that gives us a unique insight into the dimensions of human courage combatting ignorance and superstition. The pre-title sequence ends with a brief statement by two tiny boys, about 9 or 10. The older places his arm around the other and says, "I can probably speak for all the kids in the United States—and my brother even. We all believe in equal rights for kids . . . I think that should be made into a law too."

With the brightly punctuated titles we realize that we have been witnessing a preparatory overture and that the parades are beginning. The "Dykes on Bikes" lead off the procession followed by thousands of women down San Francisco's Market Street sporting banners: "We are your teachers," "Gay, Alive and Healthy," and "Remember the Witch Hunts," against a strong ballad, "Reflections" by Marjie Orten, on the track. Breaking into the procession is the second long sync interview with two lesbians from northwest Kansas, one of whom was married for 15½ years before coming out in the Army Reserves in Alabama. She tells of losing jobs because of being gay and finally leaving for the coast with her lover out of desperation.

The pace picks up its rhythmic momentum, however, with a three-part "Are You Gay?" sequence, beginning with an aerial view that yields to a handheld tracking camera cutting from response to response, from yeas to neas, from "I don't think I can classify myself" to "that's none of your business." The flow of responses is an introduction to the next sustained interview, shot

against the constant movement and sound of the parade. Its subject is a handsome businessman, dressed in a three-piece suit, 60 years old but looking easily 20 years younger, who talks about coming to San Francisco after World War II. He speaks positively about the parade as a "show of individualism and people power that we saw in other minority movements back in the fifties and sixties." His interview continues as a voice-over, a spring-board for a visual recap of the history of Gay Liberation and its public manifestations. As he remarks that "parades have changed over the years as gay consciousness has changed," we see black-and-white footage of the Stonewall Bar boarded up and demonstrators preparing for the first Gay Pride March in June 1970, intercut with views of the first march on Hollywood Boulevard indicating the celebratory quality of "coming out" such events began to signify. As the sequence gains momentum verses of James O'Connor's up-beat ballad "Great Expectations" are interwoven with further interviews, climaxing in the intercutting of a 1972 view of the San Francisco march—30 stories above the City Hall plaza—with an identical composition from 1977; a movement grows from about 2,000 people to approximately 100,000.

As the crowds pass by one observer says, "This parade is bigger than any one reaction," a statement that accurately describes the kaleidoscopic vision imparted by *Gay USA*. Following positive and moving images of men and women affectionately gathering in Central Park, a debate is heard between a Constitutionalist and several Fundamentalist Christians. The former argues that churches have always backed repression: war, witch burning, the Crusades, and the Spanish Inquisition, while the Fundamentalist blandly asserts that the Bible says sex, aside from procreation, is "degrading, decadent, weakening, childish," and, astonishingly enough, that "man was not intended to enjoy his senses"(!). But his opponent argues for a separation of church and state. "It's right there in the Constitution—freedom of religion. And you can't have freedom of religion if you have religion in the law."

Although the tone of Bressan's film is primarily positive, the inclusion of dissenting opinions offers the viewer a climate of dialectic in which prejudices may be questioned. Even in a city that traditionally is "open" for gays to pursue a free and equal life in diverse ways there still are elements of intimidation and violence. Just days prior to the 1977 San Francisco march Robert Hillsborough, a handsome young man, was brutally stabbed on the streets by a trio of youths. Bressan has dedicated *Gay USA* to him and closes the film with a spontaneous floral remembrance on the steps of City Hall seen from an aerial view. Several young men recount experiences of being called "fag" by black men on the streets. But the anger that emerges is channelled back into creative impulses in Pat Parker's unforgettable recitation of her poem, "For the straight folks who don't mind gays but wish they weren't so blatant," which should give many self-righteous heterosexuals plenty of food for thought.

Bressan's feeling for ideological and aesthetic contrasts extends to differences within the gay community itself. The notion of drag is viewed with disfavor by a woman who sees it as degrading to women. "I don't pretend to understand what motivates the men to do that but I know that the whole society mocks women at the same time that it pushes them into that role," meaning the stereotype of femininity. Her interview is intercut with a positive view by an intelligent, bearded youth in a sequined drag costume. He contends that "drag is just the tool that you use to express who you are in terms of clothes." He personally finds a political sentiment behind wearing women's clothing, which makes him feel like a whole rather than a half-person. Again the interview becomes a voice-over that leads to the film's most complex constellation of ideas and imagery. A parade float featuring blow-ups of the faces of Stalin, Hitler, Anita Bryant, a Ku Klux Klan member, and Ida Amin, is intercut with Nuremberg rally footage from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will,* as the young man notes that "in fascist societies, people are taught to dress alike, to act alike, to perform alike, as opposed to following their inner needs. When you look at mass demonstrations in totalitarian societies, I mean where you see as many people as there are here today, you don't get a sense that these are real people . . . I mean you see herds of sheep." Bressan's brilliant juxtapositions clearly demonstrate the lack of individuality that his subject sees as the basis of stereotyping in racism and

sexism, and precisely how this is refuted by the diversity of the gay marchers. Suddenly, another voice informs us of the history of "The Pink Triangle," a mark used by the Nazis to designate homosexuals who died by the thousands in the concentration camps, with a visual evocation of the past, dissolving into the present and back to a historical truth.

This chilling reminder of past persecution shifts quite naturally into a positive, major key with the Gays in History sequence in which an interviewer asks various persons, "If you could invite one gay person from any period in history, who would you like to see here today?" The answers are interesting: Alexander the Great, Sappho, and Diana the Huntress; Jesus Christ; Herman Melville; André Gide; and Bessie Smith. Countless other names are cited as the parade floats by with pride and dignity.

Word is Out and *Gay USA* are unique documents in the history of cinema because they represent, for the first time, a truly open response to the world of a vast and extremely divergent human minority that is now on the move to secure its human rights and full participation on an equal basis with the heterosexual majority. While a number of straight individuals contributed to both films, each speaks with a voice long denied the access to the media which has been granted other minorities, and one which will no longer remain silent in the face of bigotry and oppression.

Ironically, although these films are largely intended to educate non-gays about the realities of gay existence, they have so far been seen chiefly in metropolitan areas by predominantly gay audiences. While *Word is Out* is greeted with a calm, reflective response, *Gay USA* tends to generate a spirited air of celebration and an emotional "high" that can be felt by any viewer sensitive and open to feelings. There is no question that, if seen by large numbers of people, these films could prove to be highly effective tools for social change, for a revolutionary transformation of consciousness and an acceptance of sexual, as well as religious and political differences that might lead to a true "liberty and justice for all." Meanwhile, the struggle to be heard continues; those of us who refuse to listen may be seen as part of the problem, and those who elect to listen with patience and openness may prove to be part of the solution. —LEE ATWELL

WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN?

Director: Karel Reisz. Script: Robert Stone and Judith Rascoe, based on Stone's novel "Dog Soldiers."

> *"Only he who altereth remains unalterably mine."* —Nietzsche

Nietzche's definition of his *Übermensch* was based on his belief that man possessed, as his strongest instinct, the will to power, the will to win his way to a stronger and higher existence. Implicit in that belief is the idea that the superman knows what he wants, and how to shape events in order to reach his goals. Also implicit in Nietzsche's schematology is the premise that while all men may not share common values, they at least acknowledge that values exist, in however relative a fashion.

Karel Reisz's *Who'll Stop The Rain,* based on the novel *Dog Soldiers* by Robert Stone, has at its center two men who know a little bit about Nietzsche, and almost nothing about themselves; their sense of values is open to question, as is the very existence of any values. These men feel themselves at the mercy of events they cannot comprehend, much less shape, and their reactions to them are thus both understandable and terrifying. The catalyst in their lives, and in the film, is Vietnam.

The opening sequence of the film, shot in murky, half-lit reds, yellows, and oranges, is of a battlefield, the visual images of which convey, in their carnage, more vividly than any film in recent memory the truth of the statement that "War is hell." The landscape is that of the Inferno, and the dying soldiers seem to have encountered already far worse agonies than any imagined for the damned by the most convinced of Fire and Brimstone believers.

In the middle of this stupefying bloodshed, a war correspondent, John Converse—aptly named, and played by Michael Moriarty in a performance so understated and so perfectly tempered that it rivets one's attention in the midst of the shattering action and broader acting surrounding him—has an epiphany.

He has been told by the driver of his jeep that elephants have been designated as enemy agents, because they are used to carry supplies for the VC. The War Department has decided therefore that

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the elephants are to be stampeded, and gunned down by helicopter guns from above. "In a world where elephants are pursued by flying men, people are just naturally going to want to get high" is the conclusion he adopts intellectually, though his decision owes far more to his emotional inability to take in the gore and grief around him.

In a letter to his wife, Marge, he states, "I have no more cheap morals to draw from all this death." No more cheap morals perhaps, but hare-brained schemes are still within his province. He decides to run several kilos of heroin back to the States, because in a war in which he has been told that " . . . porpoises have been trained to kill gooks," ethics have become an irrelevancy.

At least that is the best interpretation one can give to his actions. The film, unlike the novel on which it is based, is most successful on the level of an action-thriller. A viewer has to supply a good deal of the emotional underpinnings not only to specific scenes, but to whole characters and their motivations. Tuesday Weld, in her best performance since *Play It As It Lays,* portrays the wife as best as she is able given the characterization provided by the screenplay—adapted by Stone and Judith Rascoe. The novel had given the woman a harder edge, a self-interest and self-possession that is missing in the screen treatment; consequently, while Marge is made more sympathetic, she is also less accessible to an audience's understanding. Her most telling line of dialogue is delivered in response to her father, in whose bookshop she has been working in Berkeley. Her reply to his question of whether she had not intended to decrease her pill-popping is "There seems to be a question of motivation here." The line echoes uncomfortably throughout the film, especially in relation to her character.

The focus of the film, however, is less on Marge and more on her husband, and his friend Ray Hicks. Hicks is the dark heart of *Who'll Stop The Rain,* beating frighteningly in a performance of surprising intensity and depth by Nick Nolte. His pulsing, reflexive Hicks is a perfect counterpoint to the heady ratiocination of Converse. The latter can tell his Saigon connection, Charmian (Gail Strickland) "I desire to serve God, and grow rich like all men," and then wryly attribute the quote to " . . . some great hustler of the past." At the same time he is demonstrating that he is barely holding himself together. In his meeting with Hicks, a former buddy from the Marine Corps, who is to carry out the actual delivery of the dope, Converse can afford to drop the defense of his attempted droll tone, and admit that he is a "virtual paranoid," who feels "this is the first real thing I've done in my life." His repetitive insistence that he is sure he is doing the right thing rings unbearably hollow, and reveals him to be stuck in a quandary of rightness and wrongness—concepts he cannot shake from his head—even when his heart tells him they no longer have any meaning.

It is Nolte's Ray Hicks who is left to articulate, in his primitive way, and then to act on the recognition, that to be right or wrong is meaningless. To live, to win out over others, to take control—if only of one's own life—is the only objective left that is worth attaining.

In a pivotal scene between the two men, in which Hicks is raging about the senselessness of their situation, while gauging the danger of running scag rather than grass, he explodes physically by punching his fist against metal. He then explodes verbally, by spitting a question at Converse: why are they about to do something that they both know on some level is maniacal? Hicks's aside, "I didn't think we were like that . . . " is countered by Converse's assertion that indeed they are. Then, in a blinding piece of self-deception the correspondent declares that his Vietnam experience has opened his eyes: "Isn't this the place where they say everyone finds out who they are?" Hicks's response, "What a bummer for the gooks," is equally limited and faulty. Vietnam has not really changed either man, but rather crystallized what each has carried to that tiny corner of Southeast Asia. And if the film is credible in its view of Converse and Hicks, then all of us who function as they do stand condemned.

This film is neither a cheap exploitation of the Vietnam experience, nor a simplistic interpretation of it. It attributes guilt to no specific government, person or concept. It reveals instead an emptiness at the core of our world, which no amount of talk or action can fill. The implicit assumption in the structure of the film is that as the US goes, so goes the world. And by extension, as California goes, so goes the US. The question,

then, is just how does our California-dreamt world go?

In their meeting, Converse picks up a copy of Nietzsche's works, which is lying in Hicks' room, and asks if he is still reading "that stuff." Hicks' affirmative reply, with its addendum, "You gave it to me," elicits only a broken, weary "Yeah, I used to do those things, didn't I?" In some ways, Converse who is universally described as a "dedicated non-swinger" (his wife, in a mixture of self-pity and contempt for him, cries "He can't even roll a joint") knows he cannot succeed in his plans. He is no great hustler, past or present, and only a great hustler can reach the pinnacle of success, however strangely success is defined in this world. Converse is an intellectual paralyzed by his war experience, his global fears about himself and others, and an outmoded, because illusory, understanding of the ways of the world. One can only guess at Converse's former sense of self-righteousness and his dedicated sense of morality. In the manner of a rejected Messiah, he turns savagely—and characteristically, intellectually—on a world which has forced him to confront his own irrelevance. His reaction, to try to beat the world at its own game, is doomed from the start because he does not know what the game is, merely that one is being played around him.

In desperation he turns to Hicks, who tells Marge, "Your husband once told someone I was a psychopath." Marge's reply is honest: "That's a very imprecise term." But, however imprecise, it is applicable. Hicks does possess a streak of sociopathy a mile wide: he is violent, unpredictable, quick to *do* something rather than feel any interior pressures caused by anxiety or fear, and incapable of internalizing any understanding of social conscience whatsoever. He possesses two other things of vital importance: the knowledge that he cannot internalize a sense of social conscience because none exists—we are a country, a nation, a world of psychopaths; more importantly, he has the knowledge and the desire to treat not the world's condition, but his own. He does so with his skewed understanding of Nietzsche, and his interest in Eastern philosophy. Again, the film is weak here in merely sketching in the character of Hicks. There is only one scene, done in pantomine aboard the ship which carries Hicks and the scag back to California, which shows him performing his Zen exercises.

Ray Hicks (Nick Nolte) and his would-be assassin (Ray Sharkey) in WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN

Later, in the middle of a harrowing drive through the Southwest, he will read to Marge from his book of meditations: "In danger all that counts is going forward," without recognizing that forward movement can be pointless without some goal or destination in mind. He also reveals to her that his impulse to movement springs from a source remarkably similar to her husband's: "All my life I've been taking shit from inferior people. No more." There is the same sense of shared universal outrage, which propels Converse into an ultimate indifference while it launches Hicks into periodic outbursts of orgiastic, violent release.

Hicks's initial goal, however, is to make his connection safely, and to be paid off. He is aware that the plan Converse has devised is too easy, and that both the Converses and himself are considered schmucks by whoever is in control of the deal in which they are taking part. It comes as no surprise then to him or the audience that a pair of "take-off artists," Danskin and Smitty (Richard Masur and Ray Sharkey, who almost steal every scene they are in, as well as the heroin they are after)

are waiting to rip off the heroin as Hicks attempts to drop it off in Berkeley.

What is a surprise, at least to Hicks, is Marge Converse. What she is supposed to have is the pay-off money. What she has instead is a drug habit herself, a young daughter she seems incapable of providing for without a great deal of help, and a noncomprehension of the reality around her that is staggering. Long before she discloses any of this, however, the camera reveals the Converse apartment, decorated in the same half-lit reds, yellows, and oranges of the opening battle sequence. It is a marvelous touch, and slams home the point that the Vietnam battlefields existed here before being transferred to Asia, just at the moment the nominal villains are breaking in the windows and doors of the apartment.

Their entrance impels Hicks and Marge on a flight from Berkeley to New Mexico, *via* LA, in a desperate attempt to save themselves and the heroin. They are pursued not only by Danskin and Smitty, but also by their boss, an even more highly tuned psychopath, Antheil (Anthony Zerbe), the narcotics agent who wants a successful drug-bust for his record, and the drugs for his own plans. Antheil's web of connnections and influence stretches from Saigon to Washington, a fact which John and Marge Converse can never fully come to grips with: he retreats (after a torturing that outdoes the similarly sensational and repellent mutilation of William De Vane in the recent and lamentable *Rolling Thunder*) into an indifference that approaches catatonia; she retreats more deeply into drugs, because as she puts it, "It's simpler than life."

Hicks on the other hand speeds into an almost mindless movement, and occasional eruptions of destructive violence that are overwhelming to behold. His treatment of his ironically named LA drug-dealer, Eddie Peace (Charles Haid) and the pitiably laughable Beverly Hills couple, Gerald and Jody, whom they double-deal to death, is revoltingly mesmerizing.

In a sense, Hicks is at least partially and initially successful in his aims: he internalizes the danger, makes it part of himself, and consequently moves beyond terror. He takes Marge to *El Ojo Grande* in New Mexico, a mountain-top retreat first built by the Jesuits, and which in '65 Hicks and some friends had converted into a communal "dropping-outpost." The place is now a junkyard, testimony to the truth that if the values of a culture are false, then those of its counter-culture run the risk of being equally tawdry.

Hicks tries to recapture momentarily the sense of goodness, truth, and beauty he mistakenly feels he once experienced there. Marge joins him with a desultory, "Oh, why not? Fuck real life." But their pastoral is a false one: Hicks has not yet reconciled his incipient sense of the Nietzschean rejection of the good, the true and the beautiful as life-arresting, illusory values, with his pathetic but admirable groping toward a sort of Buddhistic negation of the self. Predictably, the outside world smashes into the pastoral, and events control him rather than *vice versa.* He never realizes that his boast to Marge that "The heroin belongs to whoever controls it now . . . " is a statement on need of reversal. In a sense, the heroin, the objectification of power, belongs to no one. It is in control of everyone who is chasing it. All of the psychopaths, the pursued and the pursuers, never comprehend that they are longing for a goal forever destined to be beyond their grasp, and incapable of granting full satisfaction.

What one is left with is a sense of the blind following the blind—objectified by the crazed and bloody nighttime meanderings of the various individuals around the mountain. Vietnam is brought home in more than one way in this film: the climactic battling for "the possession of the high ground here" faithfully replicates the aimless assaults and empty victories of the Asian war. In place of the Vietnamese "gooks" we have the Chicano "Chili-heads" and "Tamale-pies"; in place of the aerial flares and bombs, there are the unearthly flashings of the dated and decayed strobe lights —remnants of the hippie commune; and in place of uniformed soldiers, uncertain of what they are being asked to die for, there is the representative group of cultural psychopaths with overlapping and transitory allegiances, and fuzzily defined reasons not only for dying, but for living as well.

The film is, finally, laudable in its attempts to address itself to issues that are perhaps too large to be contained in the framework of the genre. It is also laudable in its attempt to live with ambiguities and ambivalence when easier, less truthful, explanations are wanted, not only by the characters who inhabit it, but by those of us who watch it.

Though the film is frustrating in its inability to more fully flesh out characterizations and motivations, the performances within those limitations are nonetheless stunning. Karel Reisz's direction and editing is so brilliantly paced that an audience's breathing is as shallow and pressured as that of the figures on the screen. It is the screenplay, however, even with its faults, which reverberates in one's head long after the film has ended: the final shot, of the survivors driving off into an aridity that is in ironic counterpoint to the lyrics of "Who'll Stop the Rain," is seared into one's memory. So, too, is Ms. Weld's final, ineffectual but touching, gesture with her hand. The dialogue is brilliant—funny and horrifying as when Danskin and Smitty report to Antheil on their walkie-talkie the loss of their Chicano guide who has eluded them: "I hate this *Kemo Sabe* crap. We've lost Tonto. We're in Tree City now. What do you want us to do? Over."

What one wants is that this film provide more than it has delivered, in spite of the high quality of its production values. It has temptingly promised more than it can produce, and requires from the viewer more than it has a right to. It places us in a predicament similar to that of its characters—in search of something that seems heartbreakingly just out of reach. —ED ROGINSKI

PIROSMANI

Director: Georgi Shengelaya. Script: Shengelaya and Eriom Akhvlediani. Photography: Konstantin Apryatin. Music: V. Kukhianidze. Editor: M. Karalashvili.

Pirosmani is a haunting evocation of the life of a turn-of-the-century Russian folk artist, Nikola Pirosmanishvili (1863–1918), as viewed by Georgian director Georgi Shengelaya. The film is striking not only for its beautifully controlled visual style which imitates the rich simplicity of Pirosmani's primitive paintings, but also as a carefully subdued study of the relationship between an artist and society.

So few Soviet films are released abroad, especially in the United States, that *Pirosmani* is valuable in its own right as an example of the high quality of film-making that is possible in contemporary Russia. But Georgi Shengelaya's film is far more than a mere "curiosity"; it is a highly original portrait of an artist. Very briefly, Pirosmani was a withdrawn loner who used simple yet captivating paintings of folk scenes, peasants, and princes from his native Georgia as his main means of communication. He painted in exchange for food and drink in the local taverns, gradually filling the area with his art as he roamed from place to place. He was, therefore, something of a paradox. His art was of the people and for the people of his area, and yet he himself was so withdrawn that a characteristic scene in the film is of the artist silently eating alone in a tavern crowded at the other tables. It is a tribute to Shengelaya's depth of vision and ability as a film-maker that he manages to simultaneously capture Pirosmani's great humility and almost mystical complexity without romanticizing or over-simplifying his subject.

PIROSMANI

The lives of great artists have always been provocative material for film-makers. But we have only to recall Charlton Heston sweating on his back in the Sistine Chapel in *The Agony and the Ecstasy* or Jose Ferrer as a pathetically sad-faced Toulouse Lautrec in *Moulin Rouge* to realize how trivial most Hollywood screen "artists" seem. Even when a more rounded portrait of an artist is attempted as in Alec Guinness's performance in Ronald Neame's film of Joyce Carey's *The Horse's Mouth,* the artist is usually seen as a robust, romantic free spirit who is able to burn his candle at both ends with impunity. *Pirosmani* is a clear contrast with popular film stereotypes. Shengelaya presents an artist with the primitive impact of Douanier Rousseau but without the

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exotic sensuality of his South Sea island subjects. Pirosmani might be called a Rousseau who never left home but chose rather to celebrate his peasant heritage through his art. And he is a quiet loner rather than a Dionysian reveller, a singularly unambitious man rather than a seeker of fame and fortune. "I wanted to paint what I painted," is as elaborate an answer as he ever gives to those who wish to know him better.

Avtandil Varazi, who is also the art director of the film, gives a finely muted performance as Pirosmani. Much in the tradition of Bresson's inward characters, especially the priest in *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne,* Varazi succeeds in portraying Pirosmani through his "non-acting." He seldom speaks, moves, or even paints. His bearded gaunt face frames a kindly but distant gaze. He is, in fact, very much akin to Melville's mysterious and sullen Bartleby who would "prefer not to" do anything. Thus Shengelaya focuses on the gaps between Pirosmani's paintings rather than on the act of creation itself. His most important work, for instance, a large mural depicting the whole town in which he lived, is simply shown in its completed form in a scene immediately following one in which some of the townspeople lock him in the room in order to paint. We see the product instead of the process. But more importantly we see the environment from which Pirosmani drew his strength and vision. Shengelaya's portrait of an artist is therefore a documentary hymn to Georgia. To understand something of this folk artist, Shengelaya suggests, we must come to know something of the nature, texture, and spirit of his people and place.

The film thus has the coloring, texture and *pace* of Pirosmani's art. Many of the shots, beautifully photographed by Konstantin Apryatin, appear to us like folk art. There is the soft beauty of the Georgian landscape: misty river scenes with the town up a long slope in the background; light but never bright scenes of summer vineyards with the peasants bringing in the harvest; pale winter shots of snow and ice on the river; and the rich late-afternoon colors of a country road with an ox cart passing in front of an onion-domed Orthodox church. For those who have not seen the film, such descriptions must sound terribly romantic, especially from a Soviet view of the idealized peasant life. Yet Shengelaya, son of director Nikolai Shengelaya (1901-1943), portrays a landscape and a people that have a sense of dignity but also a certain quiet melancholy. We do not find the hearty gusto of Dovzhenko's peasants in *Earth* filmed against an engulfing sky, nor the relaxed carefree spirit of Renoir (the painter) as reflected in his country scenes. The landscape and the peasants are, therefore, not idealized, but simply presented as we assume they must have been in pre-revolutionary Russia.

To a remarkable degree Shengelaya achieves a harmony among the landscape, the peasants, Pirosmani, and his art which reflects these elements, and, ultimately, the film itself which is yet another art form embracing everything within it. Towards this end the slow pace of the film is important. There is no use of flashy montage or any other technique that has become common currency in cinematic work. Shengelaya simply presents a scene, holds the scene much longer than we are used to in commercial cinema, and then cuts directly to the next shot: primitive cinema used effectively to portray primitive art against a simple background. This kind of simplicity has, of course, been used by other directors in recent years, most notably by Theodore Angelopoulos in Greece (*The Travelling Players, The Hunters*), but as used by others it often becomes a mannerism just as bothersome and self-conscious as slick, fast-paced Hollywood films. Shengelaya, on the other hand, has made his technique seem invisible because it so closely matches his subject.

While plot is subverted for mood and character in this film, there is nevertheless a story told. Pirosmani, who is already well known in the taverns of Georgia for his paintings when the film opens, decides he wishes to try his hand at running a grocery store in front of which he places a painting of a cow on either side of the door. His attempt at small-time capitalism is short-lived, however, as tries over-charging the rich while giving food away to the poor. Once the peasants and townfolk hear that he sells his goods for free, Pirosmani is soon cleaned out. He then sells his two "cow" paintings and leaves. The feeling is not so much that he is a St. Francis or a pre-Soviet revolutionary, but rather that it is simply

not in his nature as an artist to succeed in something other than his art.

And even in his art he is betrayed by others. Pirosmani is finally "discovered" by several artists who appreciate his work. Yet after his paintings are honored by government officials and other artists, criticism and cartoons in the press ruin his reputation by making fun of his "inability" to paint "correctly." Betrayed by the commercial art world, he is likewise betrayed by tavern owners who sell his paintings for a profit whenever they have the opportunity. Shengelaya finally uses Christ's resurrection as a metaphorical parallel for Pirosmani's ultimate "victory." Locked in the large room, as mentioned earlier, this dying artist paints his last and most complete work: a vision of the whole area captured in a mural. He emerges from his three-day ordeal on Easter day and is carried by friends to join the celebrations before he dies. Shengelaya is never didactic about the parallel but the suggestion is there that Pirosmani, and, by extension, all artists, transcend the limitations of their lives and background through their art. Furthermore, the Christ parallel appears not so much as a religious dimension to the film, but rather as yet another "folk" element. The churches, the priests, the festive celebrations and thus the story of Christ are all part of the rhythm and spirit of Georgia. Pirosmani remains a mystery to us because of his silence, but this sense of complexity is more a sense of quiet desperation than of Dostoevski's religious mysticism. Shengelaya thus transforms religious imagery into a subtle illumination of Pirosmani's character and condition.

So much of Russian film, like Russian fiction, works on an epic scale that *Pirosmani,* in its quiet examination of one man's life, comes as a particularly pleasant surprise. One hopes that Georgi Shengelaya, who is considered a major film-maker in Russia, will succeed in bringing *Pirosmani* and his other films to a worldwide audience.

—ANDREW HORTON

CHINA'S DR. BETHUNE

In place of its usual festival of international experimental films, this year the Pesaro festival devoted its attention to the Chinese cinema, emerging from the years of darkness and turmoil that were known as "the cultural revolution." These years, between 1965 and 1975, are apparently to disappear officially into one of history's closets, for nothing from this decade was among the 20 fictional and five documentary Chinese films carefully chosen for the Pesaro occasion.

Along with the films came an imposing delegation, headed by Chang Chun-hsiang (director of the nearly fatal *Dr. Bethune,* and at present second in command of the Chinese film industry). The other creative member of the delegation was Wang Chia-yi, whose colorful films from the Changchun Studio have been seen abroad (the "minorities" films, particularly the northern *When the Grapes Are Ripe* [1952] and the southern *Five Golden Flowers* [1959]); since completing a film interrupted by the cultural revolution he is now the head of that studio. In the delegation the studios of Peking, Shanghai, and Canton were represented by their administrators.

The earliest films in the retrospective have already been shown in Europe and North America: *From Victory to Victory* (1952), films of 1955 (*New Year Offering* and *Railway Guerrillas*). Others known in the West from the early sixties were *The Red Detachment of Women,* the film that inspired Chiang Ching (Madame Mao, the leader of the now punished "gang of four") to stage a ballet whose film record may be better known to our present generation, and the tense film about Tibet, *Serfs* (shown in an amateur English-dubbed version but not in its original dramatic color).

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As a film *Dr. Bethune* is restrained and credible. Its political message may be somewhat too solemn, but sparks of Bethune's well-known impetuous and irascible character fly out now and then. Tannebaum's performance is probably more suitable than that of a professional actor. The dramatic line of keeping Bethune always a few gallops ahead of the Japanese army worked on the audience, and the tragedy of his death by blood-poisoning is not diluted by modern Chinese inhibitions concerning tragic film endings. There is no incorporation, by the way, of the actual footage taken in 1939 of Bethune in China by Wu Yin-hsien (used in the Bethune film made by the National Film Board of Canada), except as models for certain realistic sequences. This 1964 film will have to be taken into account by any of the non-Chinese projects to make a film about Bethune. With the Bethune drama also on his mind Otto Preminger has already discovered that China is stubborn about coproduction.

The decade of Chiang Ching's control of the film industry was silently passed over in this retrospective, and we came out at the other end of the tunnel with films of 1974 and 1975 from the reopened studios of Changchun, Shanghai, and Peking. One of these, *Pioneers* (about the oil fields of Taching), appears to have been one of Chiang Ching's last battlegrounds: her efforts to prevent its release were countered by severe words from both Chairman Mao and Premier Chou En-lai shortly before their deaths. Unfortunately the film now does not seem worth the struggle, except in political principle. The metallic, grinding, inflexible characters could have used some of Taching's oil.

No sign in the new short documentary films that anything has changed from the earlier staged and pretty solutions, but we hear that the successfully experimental series made by Joris Ivens is now being shown through China—and that may bring spontaneity into the Chinese form.

All in all, the Pesaro retrospective served the purpose of announcing to the West that the Chinese film industry (and art) has come out of the blank and disturbed years of the cultural revolution* and is again ready to join the international film world. Judging from the choices made for Pesaro there are plenty of films to draw upon, both from before and after the ten-year reign of Chiang Ching.

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*As future Chinese film historians are unlikely to say anything about that decade, we will have to depend on the extraordinary and informative document by Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ching* (Little, Brown, 1977).

Books

THE WORLD IN A FRAME
What We See in Films

By Leo Braudy. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1976. $8.95.

Leo Braudy is a sensible and cautious person, and a professor of English besides; he has, therefore, a jaundiced eye toward overreaching (he is a student of Fielding and Gibbon) whether critical or theoretical. Film seems as naturally multifarious a medium to him as English prose, which can encompass Pope and Joyce; he thus avoids both sweeping generalizations and zealous but factitious precision. And he can comfortably bring (for instance) Virginia Woolf to bear on the problem of Pontecorvo's excessively sympathetic paratroop commander in *Battle of Algiers*.

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tic can encompass the forms that film has taken, even in its brief history to date. What is important for him is to understand how movies "work their magic" as they show us how to be human. This means tracing the varieties of connection within and across individual films, between films and their audiences, and between films and the culture they both inhabit and express. Braudy's method is essayistic rather than hypothetical. His book is leisurely and companionable—his effort is to share responses and ideas, rather than to "demonstrate" something. Like Braudy's earlier book on Jean Renoir, *The World in a Frame* is in a way one long extended essay. Though it has demarcated parts, its concerns flow along seamlessly.

Braudy lays out one basic distinction between two tendencies he sees in film structure and style, the open and the closed: Renoir vs. Lang. I happen to think this is a useful distinction, not least because it leads one to consider in practical terms the choices that film-makers face in developing the aesthetic strategies for a film; Braudy deploys it in a rich context of films, mentioning on one page (for example) *The Heartbreak Kid, The Clock, Cries and Whispers,* and *The Poseidon Adventure,* about all of which he has interesting things to say. And Braudy does not imply, as Bazin did in demarcating "montage" from "deep-focus" forms, that one is somehow inherently better than the other—he has no religious or philosophical bias to push through his criticism, though he sometimes expresses strong opinions. But the theoretical mileage that can be extracted from the distinction is limited, and Braudy wisely does not attempt to build his whole book around it. (Someone else might build a book around his suggestion that TV is inherently a closed form, and that its best director products—Frankenheimer, Penn, Lumet—learned this early and carried their skills over into film.)

Braudy views it as ineluctable that narrative film (he excludes experimental film from his purview) entails identification with characters, that a familiar performer brings along a cloud of associations from earlier roles, that "we are held to films by the human face." He is not perturbed by the alleged ideology of the realistic film, and indeed writes that "the methodology of film criticism must finally be brought into the world of story, whether fiction or nonfiction." The understanding of film is thus not an arcane specialist task, but a humanistic study in which anyone can play. (With semiology in mind, Braudy writes that "it is difficult to defend any criticism that discusses a popular form in mandarin terminology.") Braudy likes a great many kinds of films. He has a lot to say about musicals, about westerns, handling genre questions with authority and insight, raising interesting questions without descending into nitpicking definitional debates; and he treats intelligently the ways Truffaut and Godard incorporated and transcended American genre conventions in their own work.

The World in a Frame, then, is a book in which the author's basically sympathetic and curious approach leads to a kind of quiet conversation with the reader. In an era of militant Theory, this is not everybody's dish of tea; some may wonder why Braudy never snarls or Imposes a Synthesis. But if it is a legitimate test of criticism to ask whether it will be readable five years hence, Braudy passes handily. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

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